EDMUND WILSON'S CASTLE
JAMES WOOD

IN SUPPORT OF JOHN ROBERTS
THE EDITORS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

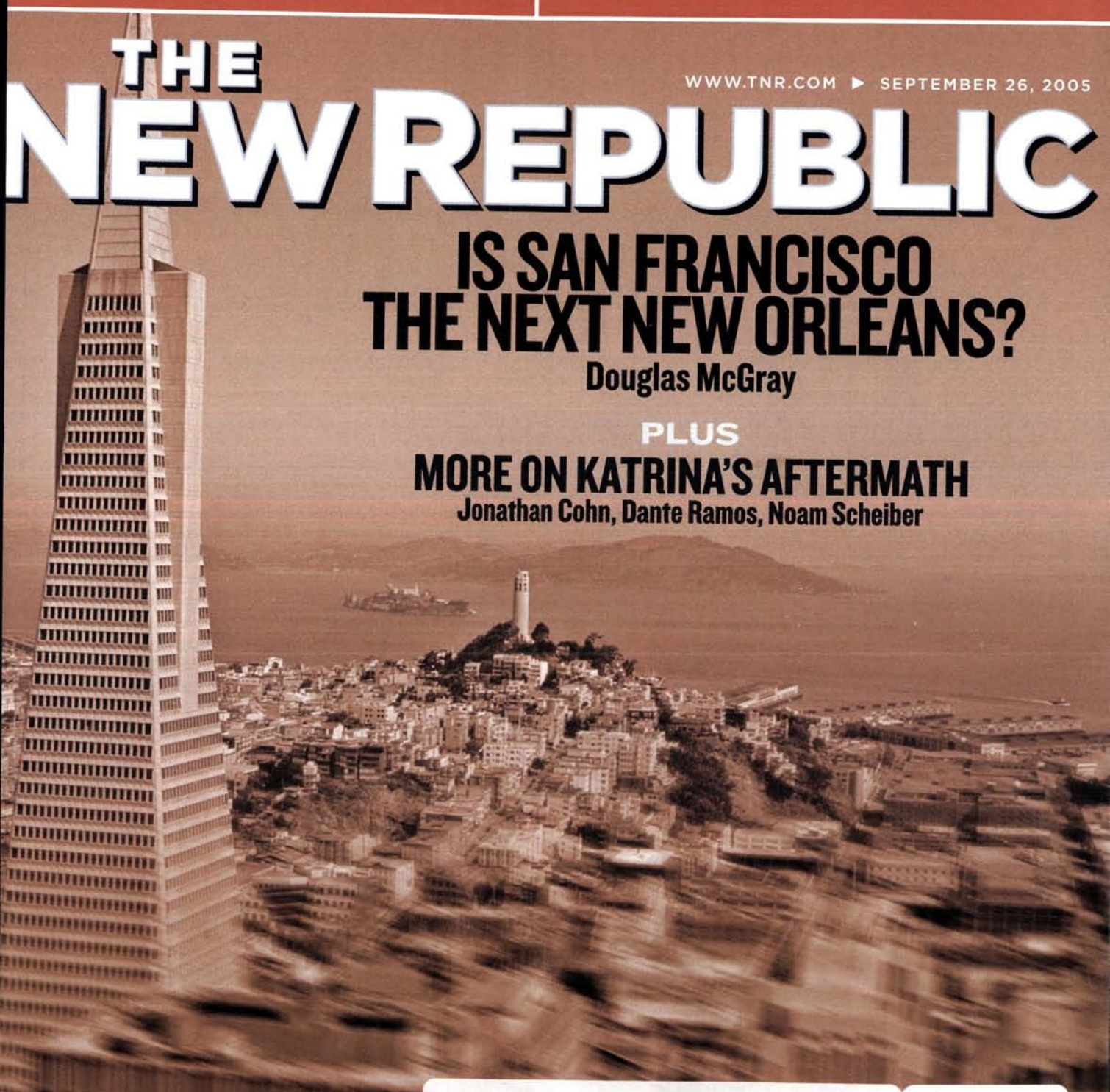
IS SAN FRANCISCO THE NEXT NEW ORLEANS?

Douglas McGray

PLUS

MORE ON KATRINA'S AFTERMATH

Jonathan Cohn, Dante Ramos, Noam Scheiber



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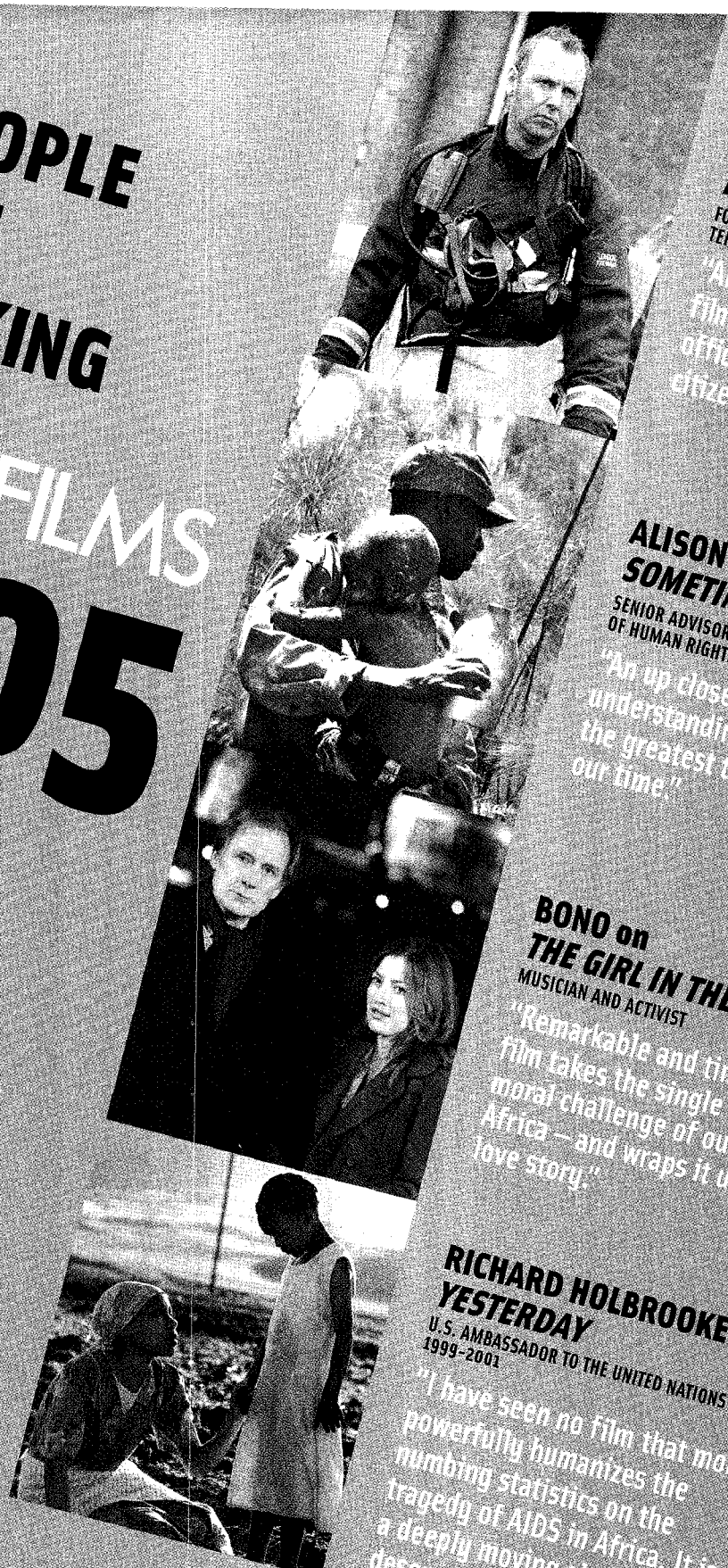

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COVER PHOTO BY *Mark Gibson; enhancement by H2C*

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CORRESPONDENCE

NUCLEAR OPTIONS

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE IS NO ready solution for halting Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programs ("Strike Out," August 15). But the worst possible scenario is for the program to proceed unhampered, allowing Iran to have not only the weapon but the means of delivery within the next several years. There is nothing in the utterances of the leaders of Iran that would lead us to believe that they would be reluctant to use this weapon against Israel or any other U.S. ally in the region. Iran has already shown—by its support of terrorism worldwide—that it will not be deterred in its goal of making fundamentalist Islam dominant in the world. We have a choice, namely to stop their program—not by invasion, which would be futile, but by selective airstrikes—or let it continue until our allies are subjected to an unprovoked, catastrophic nuclear attack.

NELSON MARANS
Silver Spring, Maryland

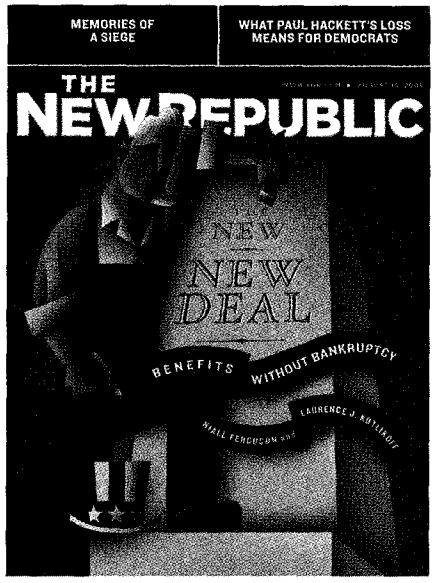
SOURCE CITATION

CREDIT THE NEW REPUBLIC WITH a well-developed sense of irony: Ryan Lizza's piece about "sources close to the White House" may have named names, but only as revealed by "a longtime White House reporter," "numerous reporters," "a wire reporter," "a newsweekly correspondent," et cetera ("Source Code," August 15).

AVA N. SANDBERG
Phoenix, Arizona

IRELAND IRE

RON DEPASQUALE'S DISPATCH IS A first-rate assessment of the Ulster problem at this juncture, with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) finally ending its long war—if only seven years after they first seemed to agree to end it ("Separate Peace," August 22). Still, the IRA, like the "loyalist" gangs, will give up neither their criminal activities nor the intimidation of "their own" neighborhoods. But I disagree with DePasquale when he repeats the standard Sinn Fein–IRA line that the "[Protestant] Orange Order['s] . . . summer marches [go] through [Catholic] neighborhoods." That phrasing



makes it sound like the Orangemen are parading through Catholic housing developments to, as Sinn Fein says, intimidate the inhabitants. What the Orangemen are seeking is passage along urban or suburban avenues to get from one location to another. Even if the Orange lodges agree to pass by Catholic enclaves silently with their banners furled, Sinn Feiners object to their presence.

ROBERT ST-CYR
U.S. Liaison
League for Pluralist Democracy in Ulster
Greenlawn, New York

CRITIC'S CRITIC

JAMES WOOD IS SO BUSY USING ME to stage a rescue of "literary realism" that he fails to notice that I never dismissed it in the first place—although I did write that some books branded by that critical catchall leave me cold ("The Blue River of Truth," August 1). And my words did not appear during "a long, raucous discussion about fiction, realism, and fictional credibility on a literary blog called 'The Elegant Variation.'" The title of "The Elegant Variation" thread I contributed to was "In Which Heroes Stumble," and the staggering colossus in our midst was Wood himself. Some did branch off into matters of style and genre, but the repeated focus of discussion was Wood's critical chops, which his recent savaging of Nicole Krauss's *The History of Love* in the *London Review of Books* caused some posters (usually ardent, docile Woodies) to question. I can't imagine why Wood singled out my comment and its diction for disapproval, but TNR readers may consult the entire discussion from "The Elegant Variation" blog and note that my postings on Wood's writings were notably more critical and vehement (perhaps a bit too much of both) than those of any other contributor.

PATRICK GILES
New York, New York

WAR BURDEN

THE EDITORS WRITE THAT CINDY Sheehan "deserves the opportunity to meet with our commander-in-chief (yes, it would be her second meeting, but a president who has time for a two-hour bike ride with Lance Armstrong during a five-week vacation has time to meet again with the mother of a man he sent to war and, ultimately, death)." This is an interesting claim ("War Debt," September 5). Do the editors mean to say that every parent of every American soldier, sailor, or Marine killed in combat deserves at least two personal meetings with the president of the United States? Or are Cindy Sheehan's merits unique?

ALAN JACOBS
Wheaton, Illinois

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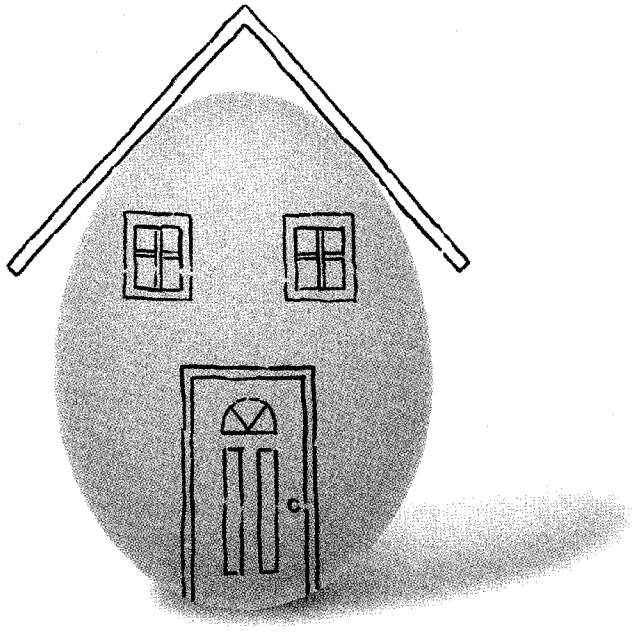

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Friends

TRB FROM WASHINGTON

WILL NO ONE DEFEND George W. Bush? Amid revelations that FEMA has been overrun by incompetents, commentators have rushed to blame Bush administration cronyism. This is not only the unsurprising conclusion of *New York Times* columnists Maureen Dowd and Paul Krugman. It's also the conclusion of many principled conservatives. As Andrew Sullivan recently wrote, "[T]o place a complete hack in charge of response to a national emergency is criminal negligence."

The implication from Dowd and Sullivan is that, while cronyism is a constant feature of presidential politics—both cite Bill Clinton specifically—Bush has practiced a particularly egregious version. Krugman blames the pervasiveness of cronyism in the Bush administration on its lack of intellectual seriousness. But all of this may be a little too hard on Bush, if such a thing is possible. The problem may have less to do with the current president than with conservatism itself.

Let's first distinguish between two very different types of cronyism. The first kind is what you might call "inner-circle cronyism": Pretty much every president has dragged a small collection of cronies with him into the West Wing. Whereas Bush brought Karl Rove, Alberto Gonzales, and Karen Hughes, Clinton had Bruce Lindsey and Mack McLarty. The reason for this phenomenon, as John F. Kennedy once explained, is that the White House is a lousy place to start making friends. Presidents need advisers they can trust unconditionally, and longtime friends and associates are often the only ones who fit the bill. If Bush is exceptional in this case, it's only because he so values loyalty that he refuses to fire these people even after they've proved themselves incompetent.

It's the second kind of cronyism—call it "outer-circle cronyism"—that's truly destructive. The focus here isn't so much on handing out jobs to dubiously qualified friends and associates—that is, to one's *own* cronies. It's on handing out jobs to cronies of cronies, which increases the scale of the cronyism exponentially. The Clinton administration was relatively free of this pestilence. (Clinton's appointments were largely meritocratic even when they involved people in his extended social network.) The Bush administration is infested with it.

Mike Brown, the former FEMA director, is a college friend of Bush campaign manager Joe Allbaugh. Treasury employs former political hands but few top economists. The Coalition Provisional Authority, the agency tasked with governing and rebuilding Iraq, was largely a dumping ground for low-level Bush campaign officials. Meanwhile, as my colleague Spencer Ackerman has reported, the Bush administration insisted in 2002 that the Department of Homeland Security be exempt from having to stock its upper ranks largely with members of the Senior Executive Service—the elite cadre of civil servants who make the government's machinery run smoothly—in order to give it more political appointments.

As it happens, this strain of cronyism was also a prominent feature of Ronald Reagan's administration—the last bona fide conservative one to occupy the White House. Reagan had his share of inner-circle cronies—Ed Meese, William French Smith. But, as with Bush, what distinguishes the Reagan administration is that it was teeming with outer-circle cronies. The Reagan White House was constantly putting out fires caused by hacks in bureaucracies like the U.S. Information Agency (run by the husband of Nancy Reagan's best friend, who secretly taped conversations with top officials in hopes of cashing in on a memoir) and the Environmental Protection Agency (a former toxic-waste cleanup official was convicted of lying to Congress about favoring her ex-employer). According to *The Washington Post*, Reagan's personnel office, which was charged with staffing the federal bureaucracy, was "a study in cronyism," run by a crony of Reagan crony Meese. In 1987, Democratic Senator John Glenn released a report documenting the Reagan administration's efforts to gut the Senior Executive Service, a move that anticipated Bush's. Even conservative commentators like Bill Safire made cronyism a constant theme of their Reagan-era coverage.

Why do conservative administrations specialize in outer-circle cronyism? The answer has to do with the fact that conservatism doesn't hold bureaucracy in very high regard. (I refer mostly to federal bureaucracy. Conservatives are more sympathetic to local government.) Conservatives believe that bureaucracy is inherently bumbling, inefficient, and, well, dumb. "[T]he brutal fact is, government tends toward bureaucracy, which means elaborate paper flow but ineffective action," as David Brooks wrote on Sunday. Even Bush himself couldn't resist a jab at bureaucracy in a press conference shortly after Katrina. "[B]ureaucracy is not going to stand in the way of getting the job done for the people," the president announced. (In fact, as Daniel Franklin showed in a devastating *Washington Monthly* piece in 1995, one reason bureaucracies work badly when they're full of incompetents is that such people are scared to make mistakes and therefore cling to the letter of bureaucratic rules. Competent people usually know when breaking the rules is justified.)

On top of that, as my colleague Franklin Foer has pointed out, conservatives don't place much faith in experts—the people who, since the Progressive era, have largely manned bureaucracies. Modern conservatism tends to see social science as an attempt to couch liberal views in the language of objectivity.

Now, if you happen to think bureaucracies are structurally incapable of improving people's lives, and if you have contempt for the kinds of people who reside in them, then you have two choices: You can either slash the bureaucracy and refund taxpayers' money, or you can reconcile yourself to the existence of bureaucracy and run it as a patronage operation. (If, by definition, a bureaucracy can't get any less competent, you might as well make appointments that benefit you personally or politically.)

But, in reality, it's just not politically feasible to cut bureaucracy very much. Despite conservatives' best efforts, government grew under Reagan, under a GOP congress, and it has grown by leaps and bounds under Bush. Instead, conservatives have generally opted for choice B—reconciliation. About the worst thing you can say about Bush is that he's more reconciled than most.

NOAM SCHEIBEI

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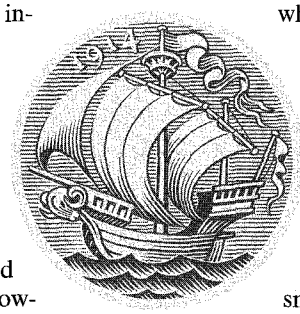
Mister Roberts

DURING THE CONFIRMATION hearings of John Roberts, Democratic senators on the Judiciary Committee were palpably uncomfortable. They had before them a conservative nominee whose political history concerns many liberals; but the Republicans won the last election, the wages of Ohio sat before them, and this able and judicious nominee is as much in the way of right-wing moderation as they could expect. Roberts is indubitably the lesser of conservative evils. As one commentator sagely observed, Roberts is not the man whom liberals would have chosen, but he is not the man whom liberals feared.

For the Democrats, a vote of opposition to Roberts might be emotionally satisfying, and, about some areas of American law and some imperfections of American society, it would record a disagreement about principle. But we must not lose sight of the good news for liberals in this era of bad news for liberals: In one respect, Roberts represents an admirable judicial ideal, which this magazine has championed since its founding. We refer to the ideal of bipartisan judicial restraint.

From the Progressive era and the New Deal through the Warren and Rehnquist years, this magazine has argued vigorously that judges should be broadly deferential to the political branches, in the name of democracy, and that they should rarely strike down laws except in cases where the constitutional arguments are too clear to ignore. This has led us to criticize judicial activism on both sides of the political spectrum, from *Roe* v. *Wade* to *Bush* v. *Gore*. Some of Roberts's youthful memos suggested that he might have some sympathy for using the courts to limit congressional power, but, after reviewing his record in its totality and listening to his Senate testimony, we are persuaded that Roberts genuinely believes in judicial deference.

"I do not have an overarching judicial philosophy," Roberts told the hearings. It is impossible to imagine Antonin Scalia or Clarence Thomas uttering those words. And, he added, "I tend to look at the cases from the bottom up rather than the top down." This is a man animated by the law, not by the movement. He rejected the dogma that the Constitution should rigidly be construed in accordance with its original understanding, and he endorsed "a more practical and pragmatic approach." He implied it was right to overturn the infamous Progressive era decision striking down maximum-hour laws—a decision still venerated in some of the more inflamed precincts on the right—and called a recent Supreme Court decision affirming a broad vision of congressional power "important." He convincingly explained his controversial opinion regarding Congress's power to protect the "hapless toad," indicating that he does not believe that the Endangered Species Act necessarily exceeds Congress's authority to regulate interstate commerce. By the end of the second day of hearings, even Senator Charles Schumer said he was "pleasantly surprised" by Roberts's answers.



But judicial restraint is not all that judges need to know or Americans need to know about. There are aspects of Roberts's record that give us pause. He seems to have a weakness for executive power. As an aide to Ronald Reagan, he was a staunch advocate of White House prerogative. And, during his brief tenure as an appellate judge, he has been extremely deferential to the president in cases involving police powers and the war on terrorism, suggesting that he might be reluctant to enforce limitations on unconstrained executive authority that the Constitution explicitly imposes. An imperial presidency would be a high price to pay for an unimperial judiciary. In his testimony, though, Roberts suggested that he is not an unthinking partisan of a unilateral executive. Invoking a judicial hero, Justice Robert Jackson, who previously served as FDR's attorney general, he said that White House aides are supposed to defend executive authority, but judges should play a more independent role. And he endorsed Jackson's view that the president's power in cases involving war and terrorism is strongest when it is supported by explicit congressional authorization.

If Roberts seemed reassuring, he did not seem dazzling. He appears to be a decent man with the soul of an attorney. He is a man of the establishment, smart but not quite wise, more suave than strident, and utterly without a trace of the radical temperament, which will be salutary in these volatile times. But who will President Bush nominate next? The conservative bench is not exactly riddled with Roberts-like reasonableness. So it is too soon for liberals to be disarmed. Confirm Roberts, and prepare for Owen. ■

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NOTEBOOK

KATRINA FULFILLS GOP DESIRE . . . GREENHOUSES TRASHED, TEMPLES ON FIRE

FAMILY AFFAIR

PRESIDENT BUSH AND REPUBLICAN congressmen have said this week that Bush's decision in the wake of Hurricane Katrina to suspend the Davis-Bacon Act, the law that guarantees prevailing wages for workers on federal contracts, was motivated out of concern for the extraordinary conditions in the Gulf Coast—and *not* by a convenient opportunity to attack a law they've been trying to destroy for years. Being born yesterday, we are perfectly ready to believe them, in spite of the pesky little fact that the suspension applies indefinitely to contracts unrelated to flood cleanup—for instance, in basically undamaged parts of Florida. And that many of the congressmen who recommended the suspension have agitated for years against Davis-Bacon, including Representative Charlie Norwood, who, according to the Federal News Service, "has been a champion of permanent reform" of the Act since 2001. And that some Bush administration projects have run afoul of Davis-Bacon in the past, such as the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Donald Rumsfeld's reforms and rebuilding at the Pentagon. In a moment of weakness, we were tempted to smell the mephitic odor of opportunism here. But we were reassured by Bush's explanations that his dad also suspended Davis-Bacon, during Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Well, so long as it's a family tradition!

DISLOYAL, DISQUALIFIED

WHEN PARCELING OUT BLAME FOR the inept response to Hurricane Katrina, don't forget the congressional Republicans who nominally oversee the DHS. Few if any of them seemed to know or care what a mess the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had become or expressed concern over the DHS's bureaucratic chaos. (And, yes, Democrats who controlled the Senate when ex-FEMA Director Michael Brown was confirmed should also be red-faced.) This week, House Republicans named New York Representative Peter King to chair the House Homeland Security Committee, which has the vital task of helping to repair the dysfunctional Department. If ever there was a committee chairmanship that should be awarded on merit, this is it. But apparently not all Republicans see it that way. King's rivals accused him of a venal sin: disloyalty. According to *The Hill*, unnamed House Republicans circulated a compilation of the free-speaking King's critical gibes about his colleagues, including his (utterly indisputable) assertion that members of the House GOP's revolutionary class of 1994 are "self-righteous." Any Republican who would hold these comments against King deserves another epithet: self-defeating.

Charlie Norwood

(FINGER) POINTED REMARKS

ON SEPTEMBER 7, SENATOR MARY Landrieu, the Louisiana Democrat, made a caustic speech on the Senate floor, saying that Bush and the federal government's response to Katrina exhibited "staggering incompetence" and that "Washington rolled the dice and Louisiana lost." But, on Sunday, during an interview with Fox News, Landrieu said that "now is not the time for finger-pointing. Now is the time to rebuild." That's right, folks, apparently the time for finger-pointing has officially expired. And don't complain; you've had your chance for days.

Honestly, though, why finger-point at the federal government when we can finger-point at the poor? For instance, Linda Chavez, president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, former candidate for secretary of labor, and former head of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, commented that "you are dealing with the permanently poor—people who don't have jobs, are not used to getting up and organizing themselves and getting things done, and for whom sitting and waiting is a way of life." Then there's GOP Senator Rick Santorum, who suggested that "there may be a need to look at tougher penalties on those who decide to ride it out and understand that there are consequences to not leaving." He later added (after some finger-pointing) that he was not referring to the one-fifth of people in the disaster area who reportedly do not own automobiles.

Finally, Representative Richard Baker of Baton Rouge showed us that not all finger-pointing need be negative when he was overheard telling lobbyists, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did."

NOT TO DISAPPOINT

THE MAYHEM THAT REALISTS PREdicted for liberated Gaza did not take long to materialize. Less than 48 hours after Israeli troops withdrew from those parts of Gaza that were home to 21 Jewish settlements, approximately one-quarter of the celebrated

DAVID COWLES

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greenhouses—acquired for $14 million for the Palestinians mostly by, as it happens, idealistic but credulous American Zionists—had been, according to wire service reports, simply trashed. Who knows how many of the rest will remain standing after a week? The Palestinian Authority (PA) had hoped that these greenhouses would be the high-tech core of Gaza's revived agricultural economy. The presence of PA police apparently made no difference; even those guarded greenhouses that remained standing were filched of their cables, water systems, and lighting fixtures. Nor was that all. Riot was the rule, in which the torching of synagogues was only the most fiery, if altogether predictable, expression. Worse omens appeared in the former settlements as the Palestinians poured in. The flags of Hamas predominated, followed in number by Islamic Jihad banners, while, here and there, the PA's own standard might be seen for a short time only to be torn down by Muslim enragés who seem more than likely to win in the January elections. Chaos spilled into Egypt, as thousands streamed over the Gaza border unchecked by Egyptian troops. Smugglers told the Associated Press this week that vast amounts of weapons have made their way into Gaza. Nobody will say who killed Moussa Arafat, Yasir's cousin and a factotum of the old and also brutal security regime, last week. But we do know that about 100 storm troopers invaded his house, itself protected by a gang of thugs. And, though the house stands a few short blocks from the Palestinian Preventive Security Service headquarters, and though the battle raged for some 30 minutes, it was several hours before the police showed up to see what all the shooting was about. But many people know who the murderers are, and it is a sign of the brutal chaos that characterizes Palestinian political culture that no one will say and that no one will arrest them. The Palestinian polity does not disappoint. ■

TNR commentary Excerpts from THE NEW REPUBLIC ONLINE

THE CASE AGAINST ANDERSON COOPER.

The Mole

By Franklin Foer

The press has spent the past week congratulating itself for awakening from its long slumber. After years of credulously reciting administration talking points about WMD and candy-throwing Iraqis, the corpse-lined streets of New Orleans have spurred reporters to finally get feisty with mendacious officials and slippery politicians. The most celebrated hero of this resurgence is CNN's Anderson Cooper.

While CNN's Anderson Cooper has garnered a reputation as the heir to Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings, his work doesn't justify that talk. He is a Yale-educated Geraldo Rivera.

When Louisiana Senator Mary Landrieu congratulated her fellow politicians for their poised response to Katrina, Cooper cried bullshit. Finally, you gasped, a reporter who understands the ridiculous artifice of TV interviews. But then you stayed tuned to the rest of his broadcast.

As the prematurely gray, preternaturally boyish Cooper walked the devastated streets of Waveland, Mississippi, he approached a woman named Pauline Conaway as she returned to her wrecked home for the first time. Cooper quietly told his camera, "I mean, people are just coming back, one by one, and finding their homes just completely gone, and it's devastating, I mean." You could hear the tears welling in Cooper, as they have done many times in the past week and in his career. Then he waved his hand abruptly in front of the camera. "[A]ctually, let's…." He shut the camera off so that it couldn't record the rest of this intensely personal, intensely sad scene. Needless to say, you know about Conaway's misery and the correspondent's virtuous pose, because Cooper broadcast it all.

The moment encapsulates all that is admirable and annoying about Anderson Cooper. He seems to appreciate the grotesque nature of TV news, its invasiveness, its frivolity, the gaping moral hole in its middle. But, despite this awareness of the phoniness and vacuity surrounding him, he proceeds to broadcast the self-righteous footage and join in the debasement of his profession. While he has garnered a reputation as the heir to Rather, Brokaw, and Jennings, his work doesn't justify that talk. He is a Yale-educated Geraldo Rivera.

AN AMERICAN FATWA AGAINST TERRORISM FALLS SHORT.

Word Choice

By Judea Pearl

In the wake of the bombings in London, America's Muslim community recognized the necessity for a formal religious response to growing extremism. The result was a fatwa, or Muslim legal pronouncement, issued by the Fiqh Council of North America and endorsed by over 170 Muslim groups, leaders, and institutions. The American fatwa followed a fatwa issued in March by the Islamic Commission of Spain, on the first anniversary of the Madrid train bombings, which declared Osama bin Laden an apostate and urged other Muslims to denounce the Al Qaeda leader. The Spanish ruling marked the first time Muslim clerics had denounced terrorism in religious vocabulary, invoking genuine Islamic instruments, such as fatwa and apostasy, instead of the qualified, secular, and arguably ineffective condemnations that had been issued in the past.

America's version has been greeted warmly by the Bush administration. Speaking on September 2 at the Islamic Society of North America, public diplomacy chief Karen Hughes said, "Those are words the entire world needs to hear." Unfortunately, while the words contained in the fatwa are encouraging, the words that were left out are no less significant. Indeed, a close reading of the American fatwa shows that it falls short of both its Spanish counterpart and a comprehensive denunciation of terrorism.

Judea Pearl is a professor of computer science at UCLA and president of the Daniel Pearl Foundation, an organization committed to interfaith dialogue, named after his son, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter murdered in 2002 in Pakistan.

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Mexico City Dispatch

El Peje

BY HUGH EAKIN

MEXICO CITY'S HISTORIC downtown was already in decline in the early '50s, when the national university abandoned it for a leafy suburb. In 1985, a major earthquake chased out the few remaining middle-class residents. By the late '90s, while the overall Mexico City population had increased dramatically to nearly 20 million, the historic center had lost close to half its population. The streets were so dangerous that even the police—hardly paragons of lawful conduct themselves—were loath to go there.

But that was before Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the city's ambitious mayor-cum-presidential candidate, decided to reinvent the art of *obras públicas*, or public works, starting with the beleaguered inner city. Thanks to an ingenious partnership with the private sector that he began in 2001, López Obrador was able to refurbish dozens of historic buildings, replace unlicensed street vendors and loiterers with upscale shops and art galleries, install surveillance cameras, and deploy specially trained security guards. And people are returning: For the first time in decades, downtown is one of the most attractive districts in the city.

Such visible, rapid achievements have special importance for López Obrador, who is the odds-on favorite to win the Mexican presidency in next July's election. On paper, he represents the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), a leftist opposition party that has never held the presidency, and rivals portray him as a potential threat to investors and international trade. Scrutinizing his populist credentials, the foreign press, in particular, has been quick to identify him as another leader of Latin America's resurgent left, or, worse, liken him to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. But there is nothing leftist about López Obrador's approach to economic development. In fact, if his mayoral record is any indication, he is more of a pragmatist with populist instincts than a left-wing ideologue. López Obrador got the business community to pay for most of the $2.4 billion downtown project in exchange for infrastructure improvements and better security. Now he says he can do the same thing for the country as a whole, using improvements in government efficiency and economic incentives to create large-scale changes without adding excessively to public debt.

"WE'RE GOING TO finish 100 percent of what we promised, because we've done a lot more than we promised," the mayor announced with typical bravado in late July, shortly before stepping down to begin campaigning full time. He was speaking at one of his famous 6 a.m. press conferences, which, during his mayoralty, took place daily in a made-for-TV studio fronting the Zócalo, the city's central square. Unlike the tongue-tied incumbent President Vicente Fox, who is from the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the 51-year-old López Obrador has maintained a skillful alliance with the media. The city establishment calls him AMLO (after his initials), or, less charitably, *el Peje*, for a sharp-toothed, hard-to-catch river fish native to his home state of Tabasco. His p.r. skills proved particularly useful this spring, when he was able to portray efforts by federal prosecutors to indict him in a minor land dispute as a conspiracy by the Fox administration to prevent him from running in next year's election. The indictment would have disqualified López Obrador as a candidate, but his supporters poured into the streets in protest, and the charges were dropped.

During his mayoralty, López Obrador proved adept at triangulating between the working classes and the wealthy. When he took over in 2000, many expected a populist program aimed at the city's millions of migrants and working poor. To be sure, he has spent a good deal of time plying them with social programs. His monthly $60 handouts to senior citizens are enormously popular. Yet his most conspicuous projects aim at the middle class and the business sector.

Significantly, while Fox's single big public works effort—a new national airport—failed miserably, López Obrador shepherded through a whole series of major projects, including a $12 million clean-up of the city's main park (like downtown, mostly privately funded) and a new public bus network in a busy central neighborhood. Perhaps most talked about is the *segundo piso*, or "second story," a new upper level for the traffic-choked beltway. Critics complain that the project—the first stage of which alone cost close to $200 million—was poorly conceived and quickly approved without an adequate review process, and that it is basically a gift to the affluent, since, by at least one estimate, only the wealthiest 8 to 10 percent of Mexico City's residents drive. But more perceptive observers argue that this is precisely the point: When the first portion of the highway was inaugurated in January, the ceremony was studded with captains of industry.

What will all this mean for a PRD victory in 2006? One view is that, despite his leftist rhetoric, López Obrador's governing philosophy is actually far closer to the neoliberalism of reformers like former President Carlos Salinas (1988–1994), from Mexico's long-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). AMLO began his own political career in the PRI, and he supports, with minor caveats, such liberalizing Salinas-era projects as NAFTA. Moreover, he is apparently close to Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim Helú, who built his telecom monopoly with Salinas's help and now runs the private foundation that has been the main engine of Mexico City's downtown renewal. Slim's involvement has

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given the presidential front-runner impeccable pro-business credentials, as well as a reputation for getting things done. Then there is the fact that one of AMLO's chief policy advisers is Manuel Camacho Solís, a former Salinas aide. Raymundo Riva Palacio, a columnist for *El Universal*, a leading daily, explained a version of this theory to me. Neither the PRI nor the PAN have enough credibility with the people to embark on painful reforms, Riva Palacio notes. López Obrador, on the other hand, has solid left-wing credentials and a populist reputation. Like Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil or, earlier, Felipe González in Spain, he could push through a market-oriented program that might spur competitive private enterprise and growth. "He's a great candidate for people with money," Riva Palacio says.

But López Obrador has pledged not to privatize Pemex, the sclerotic national oil company, and his commitment to economic reform is uncertain. According to George W. Grayson, a political scientist at William & Mary who is writing a book about him, López Obrador is neither a leftist nor a neoliberal, but rather a strong-government pragmatist—a more austere, results-oriented version of the old PRI. "He believes in spending money on projects that have a social payoff," Grayson observes, adding that "he is close to members of the business community who are nationalistic in their orientation." So far, López Obrador has not explained exactly how his municipal innovations can work at the national level, though he has promised incentives for the construction industry and other, more state-driven programs.

PART OF LÓPEZ Obrador's challenge will be to shape a message that can conquer some PRI and PAN supporters without squandering his own base. His presumptive opponents are PRI politician Roberto Madrazo, who defeated him in the 1994 governor's election in Tabasco, and one of two PAN leaders who are now in a primary runoff. (Fox himself is not running; Mexican law limits a president to a single six-year term.) The race will be tough: The PRI defeated López Obrador's PRD in two important state elections on July 3 and may be making a comeback. And the PAN retains a large following in the business community and among conservative Catholics, although it has lost support due to Fox's flagging performance.

On one count, however, *el Peje* has a distinct advantage over his rivals. In a country where political corruption is endemic, he has remained, up to now, largely untainted. There is the question of how he accomplished so much as mayor. Though the charges were dropped, critics point to a bribery scandal last year that implicated a former top AMLO aide and note that, while one of Fox's few enduring achievements may turn out to be a 2002 government transparency law, López Obrador blocked a similar measure at the city level.

Of course, for *capitalinos*—Mexico City residents—none of this matters so much as cleaner streets, walkable parks, and shorter commutes. If he can do the same for the country at large, and clean up the Mexican economy at the same time, he will prove himself a slippery fish indeed. ■

A Voting Rights Act compromise.

Race (Optional)

BY HEATHER GERKEN

THIS FALL, CONGRESS will begin debating whether to renew one of the most powerful, and controversial, civil rights laws ever passed: Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act (VRA). Section 5 requires certain state and local governments—mostly in the Deep South—to ask the federal government's permission before making any change, no matter how small, in the way they run elections. This "preclearance" requirement has achieved spectacular results. It solved the central problem in voting rights enforcement during the civil rights era: keeping up with the increasingly creative strategies Southern states used to disenfranchise black voters. Prior to passage of the Act, discrimination was difficult to police. The moment a court deemed one exclusionary election practice illegal—literacy tests, poll taxes, citizenship tests—local officials would switch to another. Section 5 allowed the Department of Justice to stay one step ahead of local officials.

But, despite its successes, Section 5—which will sunset in 2007 unless Congress renews it—has plenty of detractors. The Department of Justice must preclear thousands of changes for covered jurisdictions every year. Southern states resent being singled out for special treatment, especially given that most recent election flare-ups have occurred in places like Ohio and the densely populated areas of Florida, which are not covered by Section 5.

Supporters and opponents of the Act are gearing up for a huge political battle. Already, *The Nation* has urged its readers to "keep their eyes on the prize of renewing the Voting Rights Act" for another 25 years, arguing that recent legislation in Georgia requiring voters to present photo identification demonstrates Section 5's "continuing importance." Meanwhile, conservative scholars Abigail Thernstrom and Edward Blum have opined on the editorial page of *The Wall Street Journal* that "the Bloody Sunday police violence against voting-rights activists at the Edmund Pettis [sic] Bridge was forty years ago" and says Congress should let Section 5 expire.

This simple dichotomy—the choice between maintaining the Act's decades-old regulatory structure or allowing it to expire—is, however, a false one. There is a more dynamic approach, a middle ground that avoids the problems identified by the Act's critics while maintaining a robust safety net for minority voters.

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AFTER YEARS OF unanimous support for Section 5, even lawyers who enforce the Act and academics who study it can't agree on whether and how to renew it. What divides them is a single question: Do racial minorities finally wield enough power in the political process to protect themselves?

To understand the complexity of this question, look at Georgia's redistricting process after the 2000 census. In 2001, a coalition of white and black Democrats in the state legislature passed a redistricting plan that reduced the number of "majority-minority districts"—those where racial minorities constitute a majority of voters on Election Day—in order to increase the chances that Democrats would retain legislative control. Anyone familiar with the redistricting wars of the 1990s would understand the impulse. Because African Americans and Latinos tend to vote heavily Democratic, Democrats have long worried that majority-minority districts confine them to just a few safe districts, while helping Republicans win more of the remaining seats.

Although the plan was supported by virtually every black legislator in Georgia and blessed by civil rights icon John Lewis, the Department of Justice opposed it under Section 5 on the grounds that it unduly reduced black voting strength. A federal district court agreed, and the plan was rejected. But the lower court's decision was reversed by the Supreme Court in *Georgia* v. *Ashcroft*. The justices refused to second-guess the legislature's judgment that the plan helped racial minorities.

Some legal experts, such as New York University law professors Rick Pildes and Sam Issacharoff, argue that the Court got it right in Georgia. Why, they ask, should we second-guess the districting plan in a case like *Ashcroft*, where black legislators not only favored the change but had enough votes to block it had they chosen to do so? Minority voters have made such gains under the VRA that black and Latino legislators are now at the table when deals are made. Why not let racial minorities do what any other electoral minority does in a healthy democracy: negotiate the best deal possible? Based on these arguments, some critics like Thernstrom and Blum even go so far as to argue that we are better off without Section 5.

Other experts, such as Pam Karlan of Stanford Law School, take quite a different view of what happened in Georgia: Even if black legislators struck a good deal during the redistricting process, they did so only because they could threaten a lawsuit under the VRA. If these experts are right, letting Section 5 expire will be a disaster for racial minorities, because it will take away that bargaining chip.

The problem with this debate is that it is all but impossible to resolve. We cannot determine the extent to which the threat of a VRA lawsuit has affected political bargaining. So there is no way to be sure what a world without the VRA would look like. Opponents and supporters of renewal are thus mired in an endless debate, with neither side able to prove that its empirical hunch is correct.

RATHER THAN TRY to resolve this intractable argument, we should adopt a middle ground approach: an opt-in strategy that allows community and legislative leaders to negotiate the best deal possible for racial minorities but places a bargaining chip in their pockets—a chance to demand that the Act's traditional constraints apply when bargaining breaks down. Political deals struck by racial minorities would be enforced, but the VRA would hang like the sword of Damocles over every negotiation.

What would an opt-in approach look like in practice? Rather than "preclearing" the thousands of electoral changes localities make each year with the Department of Justice, jurisdictions covered by Section 5 would merely provide advance notice of these changes to the public. Civil rights groups would then have a chance to negotiate with local officials over any change they found objectionable. If the bargaining process was fair, a court or the Justice Department would let the decision stand. If negotiations broke down, however, the sword would fall: Civil rights groups would have the right to "opt in" to VRA enforcement by filing a formal civil rights complaint. This would put into play the full range of remedies currently available under the statute.

Would an opt-in strategy work? Similar efforts at "responsive regulation" have succeeded in areas like environmental law and consumer safety. In each case, a combination of better public information and the right set of incentives has generated a more dynamic regulatory system than the top-down approach of the past.

Under an opt-in approach, local public interest and civil rights groups—not distant bureaucrats in Washington—would decide which changes are worth investigating. Civil rights groups are *already* doing this sort of legwork. The Department of Justice receives so many preclearance requests that it cannot possibly sort through them all without help. Its "investigation" thus usually involves a call by a Justice staffer to a civil rights group or an elected minority official to see if there is a problem. An opt-in approach actually gives civil rights groups two bites at the apple: a chance to change the minds of local officials as well as to persuade Justice to take their side.

The opt-in approach also provides the right kind of incentives for those monitoring elections. Localities, of course, have every reason to work with civil rights groups to avoid the initiation of formal proceedings against them. In the long run, those incentives increase. Localities known for running fair complaint resolution processes would receive more deference from Justice when the Department is asked to intercede, and Justice would look askance at any locality that consistently ignored sensible alternatives proposed by civil rights groups.

Civil rights groups will also be guided by the right incentives. Rather than challenging *every* change localities propose—thus needlessly reproducing the current system—civil rights groups will want to present Justice with needles, not haystacks. Flooding the system with weak claims would

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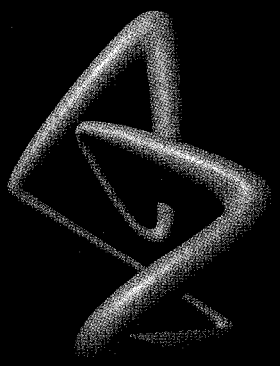

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mean that a group's complaints are likely to be ignored in the future. Additionally, an opt-in approach lets Justice conserve its enforcement resources. Rather than investigating thousands of requests, it can focus on problems serious enough to concern community leaders and divisive enough to prevent negotiations from working.

Finally, there is much to be said for waging election-law wars over process rather than substance. Take redistricting. Courts must develop a set of proxies for gauging fairness. We have already seen what such proxies look like when courts police districting *outcomes*—the almost routine imposition of majority-minority districts upon localities, precisely the type of command-and-control regulation that the VRA's critics have decried. Were courts to develop instead a set of proxies for a fair process, political elites would finally have a reason to engage with the communities affected by their decisions. Why? Just think about how one would figure out whether a process was "fair." Most of us would come up with a proxy that has already been deployed by the Supreme Court and the Justice Department: the support of legislators who represent racial minorities. In the Georgia case, for instance, it obviously mattered a great deal to the Court that there was relative unanimity among African American representatives about the wisdom of the plan. That kind of proxy would encourage the development of cross-racial coalitions and buttress the negotiating power of minority officials.

Representatives of minority communities won't always be the best proxies for fairness. Some will negotiate from a position of weakness; others will be too self-interested to be trusted. In those instances, we can take a chapter from corporate law. When directors engage in a self-interested transaction, courts grant that transaction extremely deferential review *if* it is approved by a majority of disinterested shareholders. Courts or the Justice Department might therefore rely on the views of community leaders, civil rights groups, or good governance watchdogs. And politicians would want to show that their preferred plans enjoy the support of black and Latino voters. Were courts and the Justice Department to use the "blessings" of such groups as proxies for gauging a plan's fairness, political elites would have every incentive to obtain these groups' approval.

As Congress begins hearings on the Voting Rights Act, it should consider a solution that neither abandons the all-important project of voting rights enforcement nor simply maintains the status quo. Instead, we need an adaptive regulatory strategy that creates space for us to move forward in this highly fraught area where race and politics intersect. The opt-in approach is that strategy. It creates the right sort of incentives for everyone in the system. And it might even create new channels for genuine community involvement in structuring our democracy. After all, guaranteeing such direct minority participation is, ultimately, what the VRA should be all about. ■

Cairo Dispatch

Ballot Initiative

BY JOSHUA HAMMER AND CHRISTINE SPOLAR

In the heart of Heliopolis, an affluent neighborhood in northern Cairo, stood a white tent that served as the National Democratic Party's campaign nerve center. Inside, young loyalists wearing suits huddled over banks of computers and chattered into their cell phones, making last-minute preparations for the next day's multiparty presidential elections. Gamal Mubarak, the 41-year-old son of—and heir apparent to—Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, was spinning with the smoothness of an American political consultant, insisting to all who listened that democracy had finally arrived in his repressive country. Beside him, campaign mouthpiece Mohammed Kamal, 39, sounded much the same theme. A political science professor at Cairo University—he earned a master's degree from Carleton University in Canada and a doctorate in political science from Johns Hopkins—Kamal has been ubiquitous on Egyptian television in recent weeks. He has endlessly touted Mubarak's "reform" platform to create more jobs, open more schools, and jump-start the stagnant economy. "We don't take anything for granted," Kamal told journalists earlier in the day about the upcoming vote. "We take everything seriously. We think it's a competitive election."

Kamal and Gamal Mubarak are the rising stars of an old regime that is trying to refashion its image: Western-influenced 40-somethings who speak fluent English, they think that the Middle East's autocracies need a facelift and see reform as the best way to lure foreign investment. It was these ruling party youngbloods—along with the Bush administration and a tiny but feisty domestic opposition—who helped to prod a reluctant Hosni Mubarak into holding the country's first multiparty presidential vote on September 7, urging him to go out on the stump and press flesh for the first time. But, beneath the pro-democracy talk and the polished façades, critics say, lie tangled motives and a questionable commitment to change. Orchestrated with brutal efficiency and rules skewed to favor the ruling party, the election result was never in doubt: Mubarak was the choice of 88 percent of voters. Many observers say that the whole campaign was little more than a charade intended to pave the way for the younger men's transition to power—possibly as early as 2011, when, if all goes according to their plan, Gamal Mubarak will succeed his father as Egypt's president. "[The

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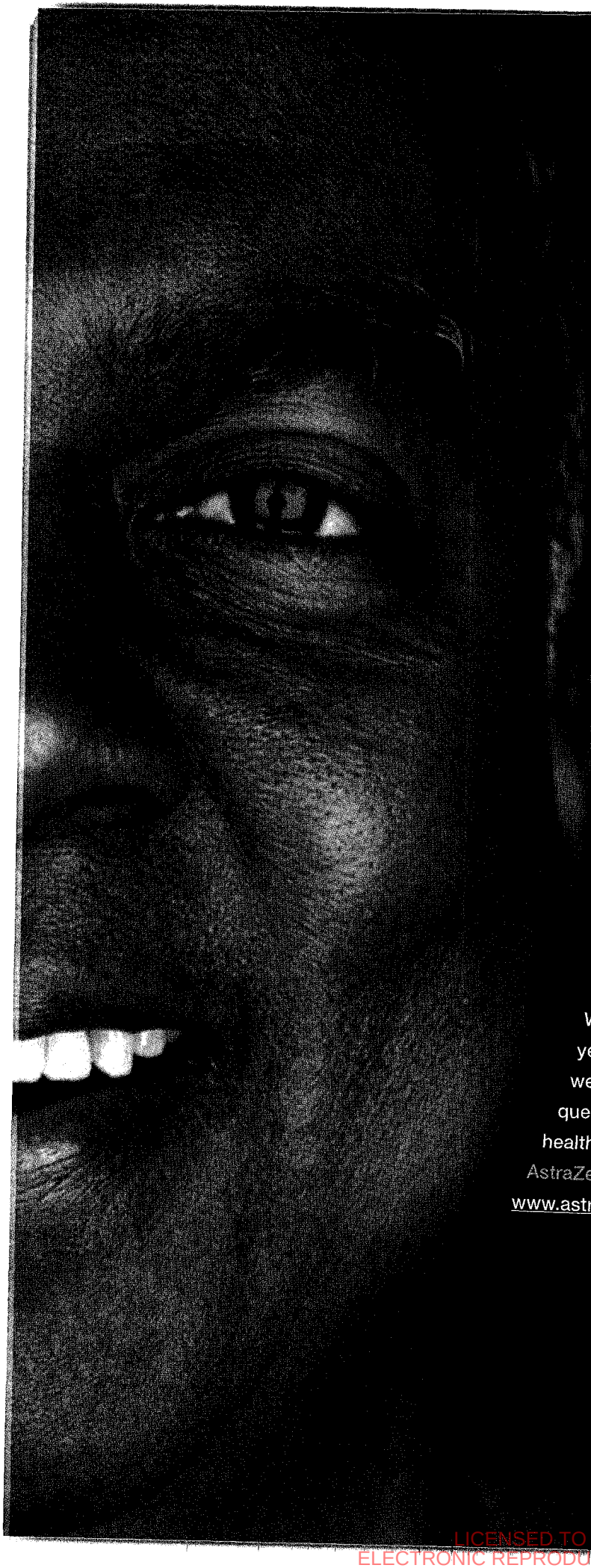

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campaign was] a training for the next generation [of the ruling party]. They're looking for legitimacy and a way to test their organization," says Diaa Rashwan of the Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo.

But it may not be so easy. After an unprecedented period of openness that saw anti-regime political ads in state-controlled newspapers and protests that regularly paralyzed traffic in Cairo, the new generation's efforts to fashion a new political system—while staying firmly in control—may backfire. "The door has been opened, and I don't think the regime can close it," says Mohammed Habib of the Muslim Brotherhood, a fundamentalist Islamic group that has been barred from forming a political party. Rashwan agrees. "They've allowed for open critique of the president and the theoretical right to vote for the opposition, but it isn't enough," he says. "[The people] want real, deep change."

THE YOUNGBLOODS RAN the Mubarak campaign with a combination of twenty-first-century image-making and old-style Tammany Hall politics. They blitzed the airwaves with slick commercials and held lavishly choreographed rallies. They practiced relentless message discipline. On Election Day, they stationed representatives at all of Egypt's 10,000 polling stations to estimate voter turnout, and then they tracked the numbers by computer. Mahmoud Mohieldin, a British-educated economist who last year became the youngest member of the Egyptian cabinet, insists that the election rules created a level playing field and that the ruling party played fair. "On a scale of one to ten"—with one being Saddam Hussein's Iraq and ten being Western Europe—"this election was a seven or an eight," he says.

But a report released this week by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights attacked everything from the presidential election commission—controlled by ruling party hacks—to the regime's decision to ban international observers from voting stations. Mubarak supporters were reportedly bused to polls in government-hired vehicles. Business owners were ordered to get their employees to voting booths or face harassment by licensing agencies. Poor women and widows were paid as little as $5 to cast their ballots, and "large numbers of women" without proper documentation were simply taken into police stations and given voter papers on the spot. "This is not a good picture of democracy," says Hafez Abu Seada, the group's general secretary.

And yet, for all its problems, the election may have created momentum for democratic reform that the Mubaraks will have trouble stopping. Cafés have been alive with talk of politics, and the strategies adopted by the pro-democracy forces—such as challenging the regime's election commission for the right to place independent monitors in polling stations—were closely watched. Monitors ended up having to negotiate their way into the polls, but they were surprisingly successful in many instances. And they gained valuable tools for the next go-round. Ayman Nour—the charismatic 40-year-old former parliamentarian whose arrest earlier this year prompted protests from the Bush administration—came in second with 7 percent of the vote, thus emerging as the leader of the nascent opposition. Nour's campaign was low-budget and wildly disorganized. But his message—he attacked ruling party corruption and called for a repeal of the repressive Emergency Laws, enacted after the 1981 assassination of Anwar Sadat—grew bolder as the weeks progressed. Equally important, the campaign changed public perceptions of Mubarak. "Before, Mubarak was seen as a God—detached, unreachable," says Negad El Borai, a human rights attorney and member of a pro-democracy group that sought to monitor the presidential elections. "Now the God is being forced to travel to the provinces, asking people to give him their vote. It's a sea change in Egyptian politics."

The sea change was apparent on Election Day. Mohammed Salem Farouq, 86, hobbled into the Mohammed Farid School for Boys in the Shoubra section of the Egyptian capital on Wednesday morning, cane in one hand, pink voter slip in the other. The election, he said, was his first opportunity to express publicly his discontent with Mubarak. "I swear, I never thought I'd live to see this day," he told *Newsweek* before casting his vote for Nour. Ten miles away, in the heart of downtown Cairo, 300 protesters marched around Liberation Square, shouting slogans that have come to define Egypt's opposition movement: "Hosni Mubarak, enough! Oppression, enough!" Fadli Behari, an employee of the Oil Ministry, watched the demonstration from a street corner. "Before today, those people would be going to prison," he said. "This month has been a real injection of political freedom and conversation. ... Mubarak is popular with a lot of people—we can't deny that. But Mubarak will realize that there is real opposition here, and he has to listen. Or he will have to admit this is a charade."

SOME FEAR THAT Mubarak will use his new electoral mandate to freeze the political process—banning opposition rallies, cracking down on dissent. But doing so would be difficult, especially since Mubarak ran on a platform of reform. Last week, in the state-controlled newspapers, the president offered a vague promise to expand civil liberties, though he stopped short of promising to release some of the thousands of political prisoners who have languished in jails for years under the Emergency Laws. The Muslim Brotherhood, which gained new stature and visibility during the campaign, has vowed to keep the pressure on the regime. "We want the abolishment of all the laws that limit the freedom of the Egyptian citizens," Mohammed Mahdi Akef, supreme guide of the Brotherhood, told *Newsweek*. "We will not rest until the people of Egypt know what it is to live in a free society." In the November parliamentary elections, analysts predict, the regime will almost certainly allow opposition parties to make substantial gains, though not enough to loosen the regime's hold on power. The question for the newly energized opposition—and for the youngbloods—is whether Egyptians will settle for that. ■

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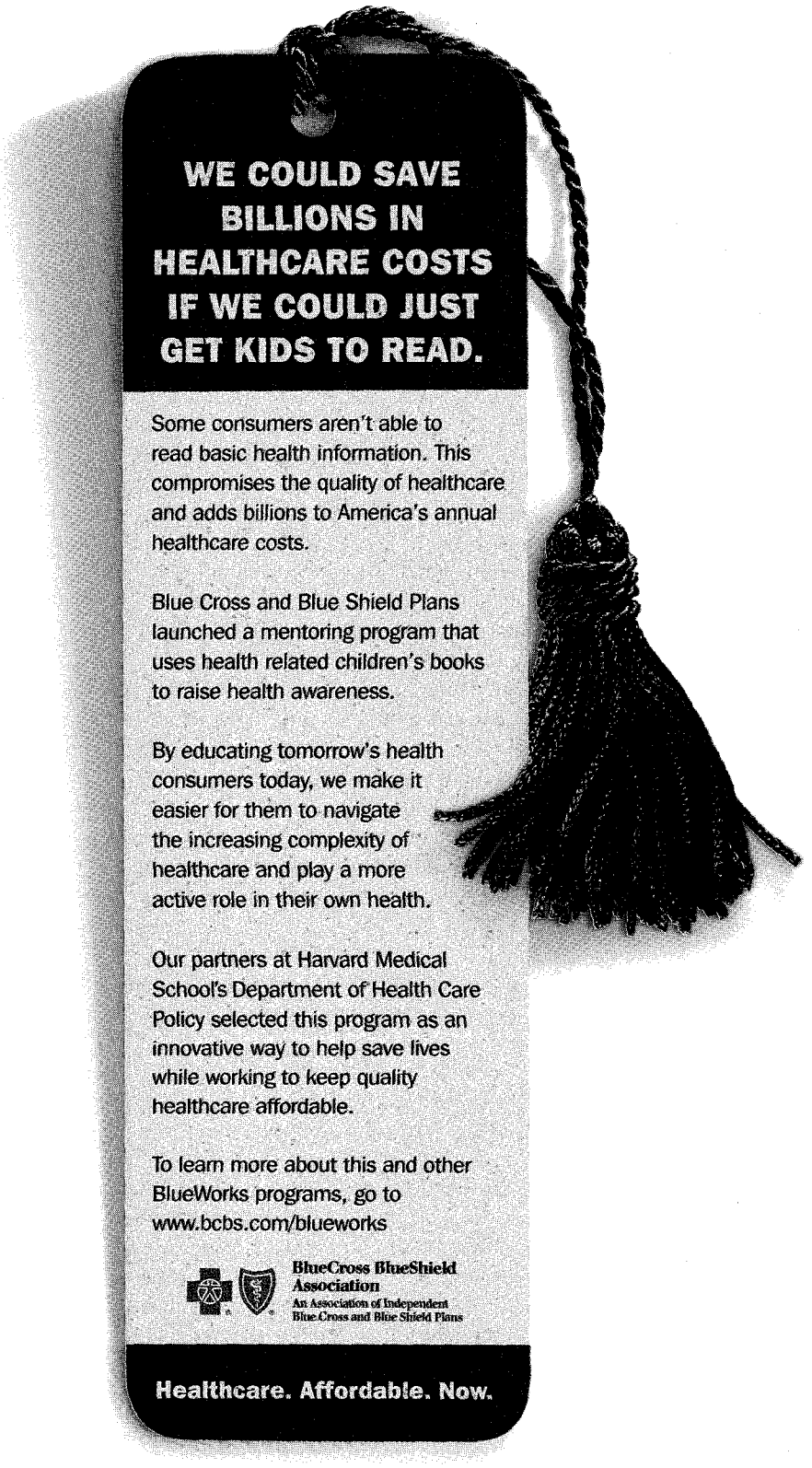
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Some consumers aren't able to read basic health information. This compromises the quality of healthcare and adds billions to America's annual healthcare costs.
Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans launched a mentoring program that uses health related children's books to raise health awareness.
By educating tomorrow's health consumers today, we make it easier for them to navigate the increasing complexity of healthcare and play a more active role in their own health.
Our partners at Harvard Medical School's Department of Health Care Policy selected this program as an innovative way to help save lives while working to keep quality healthcare affordable.
To learn more about this and other BlueWorks programs, go to www.bcbs.com/blueworks
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Katrina victims need real housing.

Trailer Trash

BY JONATHAN COHN

RECENT HEADLINES HAVE offered hope that President Bush may yet do right by the victims of Hurricane Katrina. After the first days of shameful ineptitude, he secured more than $60 billion in relief, named somebody with actual disaster experience to head the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and, rather uncharacteristically, admitted his administration made serious errors in the storm's immediate aftermath. But there is one reason to think the Bush administration hasn't learned from its past mistakes: its plan for housing the people that Katrina has rendered homeless. Many of these people needed government housing assistance even before the storm hit. Many more will need it now, since they find themselves out of work, bereft of savings, and without a clue as to when they can return home. But the administration's emerging housing scheme repeats the sins of the government's initial hurricane response—from its contempt for effective government agencies to its utter lack of sophistication about the needs of Americans in poverty.

According to the latest estimates, the government may need to provide homes for at least 200,000 households displaced by Katrina—an effort that would be unprecedented in scale but not in kind. Back in 1994, the Clinton administration faced a similar situation after the Northridge earthquake displaced more than 20,000 people in Southern California. It quickly dispatched Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Henry Cisneros to Los Angeles and produced a proposal to offer the newly homeless emergency vouchers, which they could apply toward apartment rents. The initiative was modeled on an existing program called Section 8, a bipartisan favorite that breaks up concentrations of poverty by providing vouchers and support services to help low-income families move into neighborhoods with better jobs and schools. Soon, vouchers were getting into the hands of displaced residents, who in turn began finding apartments. While the operation was hardly seamless, more than 10,000 people used the vouchers. Many later said they ended up better off than they had been before the earthquake. ("This is the biggest break I've had in a long time," one voucher recipient told the *Los Angeles Times*.)

Given the past success of Section 8 generally and the Northridge program specifically, it's no wonder that everybody from liberal members of Congress to conservative members of the blogosphere have suggested another emergency voucher program to help Katrina victims. This week, that enthusiasm propelled just such a proposal, sponsored by Senator Paul Sarbanes, to passage by the full Senate. But its fate in the House remains up in the air. And, so far, the administration seems decidedly uninterested in the idea. FEMA currently has no plans to replicate the comprehensive voucher approach President Clinton rolled out after Northridge, according to spokesman James McIntyre. (HUD doesn't, either. In fact, while HUD has asked local housing authorities around the country to give displaced hurricane victims top priority for their existing voucher programs, it has provided the authorities with no new voucher money to accommodate the additional need, meaning the agencies will have to tap funds they had earmarked for local residents.)

AND WHAT IS FEMA's preferred strategy? It seems to involve mobile homes. Lots of them. While FEMA says it is scouring the Gulf region for apartments—and will cover rent for people who find apartments on their own—its boldest move has been to order more than 100,000 mobile units, as an opening bid, which could theoretically house Katrina victims for as long as five years. Because it won't be feasible to locate that many units right in or near the devastated areas, FEMA contractors are now searching rural Louisiana and Mississippi for large tracts of unoccupied land where they could construct villages holding as many as 25,000 people each.

These Katrina towns would certainly represent an improvement over the Astrodome floor. But proposing to construct brand new communities with thousands of tightly packed mobile dwellings raises a lot of questions that FEMA doesn't seem prepared to answer, starting with the timing. While FEMA hopes to move people out of shelters and into temporary dwellings (like cruise ships, motels, and existing mobile homes) at a rate of 30,000 every two weeks, it acknowledges that it will be many months, at least, before newly constructed mobile homes can accommodate such large numbers of hurricane refugees. After all, it took months just to build the 20,000 trailers for victims of last year's Florida hurricanes. And the Katrina construction will be far more complex, since it requires erecting physical and social infrastructure, from sewers and electricity to schools and grocery stores.

Another problem this time around is the displaced population's special needs, from health care to counseling, particularly when you consider not only what these people have lost (homes, possessions, even loved ones) but the fact that their socioeconomic status meant many probably needed support services in the first place. FEMA says it will work with the relevant government agencies to make sure displaced people get these services. But experts like the Urban Institute's Susan J. Popkin, who has studied public housing for 20 years, say the coordination between FEMA and agencies like HUD in the Gulf region today looks nothing like the tight cooperation that characterized the

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reaction to Northridge. Popkin worries that FEMA's planned housing will simply replicate the blight of New Orleans or create something even worse. "To quote one of my colleagues, 'The people displaced were people who were desperate on a good day,' " says Popkin. "Concentrating them in a situation where they have even fewer resources is really bad news."

Granted, a Section 8–style voucher program would never work for everybody. (Even in Northridge, many residents had difficulty finding affordable apartments.) And many of those who opted for it would probably end up out of state, particularly with FEMA gobbling up what available apartments are left in Louisiana and Mississippi. But the Brookings Institution's Bruce Katz, who was chief of staff to Cisneros, says that, with government assistance, 100,000 people could find affordable apartments—not to mention economic opportunity—in areas that don't have the tight rental markets of, say, Boston or San Francisco. And, with vouchers, these people could start rebuilding their lives right away rather than spend two or three years waiting in government-built trailer parks. "Think of a displaced renter with a couple of kids," says Katz. "How do you get those kids into a stable environment for the coming school year and next school year? Live in a trailer? Live in a motel? It makes so much more sense to get them into stable rental housing."

IT DOES—UNLESS you have the instincts of the Bush administration. After all, the Clinton administration embraced the voucher scheme after Northridge because, when it needed to design and implement an emergency housing plan, it immediately looked to HUD—a department it had packed with capable, experienced policy hands and whose ideas (like Section 8) it was accustomed to taking seriously. But the Bush administration has tried to shrink HUD's budget and stature. It has also tried to gut Section 8, the program's bipartisan history notwithstanding. So, while the pressing human crisis of Katrina (not to mention the political backlash at the bungled federal response) has forced the administration to spend lavishly on hurricane relief, it has instinctively looked away from government and toward private firms like the Shaw Group, which won a no-bid contract to construct mobile homes. (Shaw's lobbyist, in case you hadn't heard, is Joe Allbaugh, the former FEMA director and Bush campaign manager.)

The administration has gone this route despite the fact that the mobile homes might well cost more than the vouchers (FEMA says it doesn't have good figures yet). But this, too, isn't as surprising as it might sound at first blush. Finding the most cost-effective and expedient way to deliver housing to Katrina victims would suggest that the administration has thought seriously about how government might best help the neediest Americans. And, as we've seen all too frequently this past month, that's not a question the Bush administration ponders too intensely. ■

San Francisco Dispatch

After Shock

BY DOUGLAS MCGRAY

BEFORE A STORM sank New Orleans and a pair of Boeing 767s gored the Twin Towers, officials at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) drew up a list. It escaped notice in the months of second-guessing after the September 11 attacks but took on an air of prophecy within hours of Hurricane Katrina's landfall. There were three disasters, FEMA managers concluded at an August 2001 training session, that Americans should beware above all others: a terrorist attack on New York City, a hurricane in New Orleans, and an earthquake near San Francisco. Four years later, it's two down, one to go.

San Franciscans were probably the least surprised of anyone to show up on FEMA's list. Their city has always been a disaster-prone place. Just east of the city lies a patchwork of improvised levees, guarding the country's highest urban flood risk, the San Joaquin River delta. Almost every summer, the winds spread wildfires across hillsides baked dry by long, sunny days. Tectonic faults run the length of California, holding the Bay Area, from the office parks of Silicon Valley to the ranches and mansions of Marin, between seismic parentheses. When a strong tremor hit the region in 1989, injuring nearly 4,000 people, city officials concluded they got off easy. (A World Series game between Oakland and San Francisco was about to start, so the streets were empty—everyone was in front of a television.)

But it would be wrong to dismiss FEMA's prediction as just the latest warning for a region that gets plenty of them. As furious recriminations pour out of New Orleans, it is too easy to imagine the Bay Area facing a similar fate. California's well-tested first responders may be better prepared than their Louisiana colleagues. But California developers are racing to build up similarly high-risk land; cash-strapped city and state officials are making similar gambles that they can put off investing in preventive engineering for more immediate, or more popular, concerns; and, in the event of a catastrophe, the region's poor will bear a similarly disproportionate share of the pain, just as in New Orleans. Despite cycles of interest in disaster-planning and, at times, great progress, San Francisco will be unprepared if an earthquake makes FEMA's forecasting record three-for-three anytime soon. At the very least, Katrina ought to inspire a season of intense focus on the gravest threats to the city's residents. Even if it fails to last, it could do a lot of long-term good.

Douglas McGray is a San Francisco–based writer and a fellow at the New America Foundation.

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CALIFORNIA'S TECH INDUSTRY may have introduced the nation to "irrational exuberance" in the 1990s, but the state has been operating with a similar mindset since its earliest days. Southern California sprouted up all at once, when a brutal fare war between competing railroads dropped the price of a ticket between the Midwest and the coast from $100 to $1. Word of a few gold nuggets near San Francisco turned an encampment of 400 into a port community of 35,000 in two years. Towns were built fast and cheap. Many San Francisco developers balked at conquering the city's steep hillsides and instead dumped ton upon ton of dirt into the bay, building their way out to sea on soft, volatile earth. After the worst earthquake in U.S. history leveled much of the city in 1906—shaking it to pieces, then unleashing a fire that burned it to its foundations—builders put it back together faster and cheaper.

They didn't know any better. Earthquakes were still literal acts of God as much as figurative ones. (The planet's slipping, grinding tectonic plates were not discovered until the 1960s.) Over time, engineers figured out that a flexible building, bolted to its foundation, would hold up better than a heavy, rigid one. They also saw that, for the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, most of San Francisco had been built wrong. In the 1970s, the city established strict codes for new construction, fiddling with them through the '80s and '90s as the science of building got better. It even required particularly vulnerable brick structures to get special retrofits in order to keep them from exploding out during a hard shake. Most of the landscape, though, remained as it was: liable, if not to collapse, then to irreparable damage, were another earthquake like the one in 1906 to hit.

With their vulnerability so evident, San Franciscans have had no choice but to pay attention to disaster response—but there's disagreement on how well city and state officials have done. A San Francisco civil grand jury report in 2003 declared the readiness of first responders "a catastrophe." The report claimed that city agencies were updating their emergency plans without revising the versions they distributed to other agencies and the public; jurors found, disturbingly, that some agencies were writing intentionally vague guidelines to help them avoid lawsuits in case first responders deviated from them during a crisis. But Lucien Canton, the city's director of emergency services at the time, dismissed just about every criticism. "It is not unusually [sic] for plans to contain small errors or be several years old," he replied. When the report charged that "[d]epartment personnel are not adequately informed" of revisions to the city's emergency plan, Canton shot back, "Adequate is a subjective term that varies with the user."

When Gavin Newsom was elected mayor two years ago, he replaced Canton with a former chief of police (who had to be fired when he was arrested during a raucous public argument with his son over an earlier incident in which the son, also a police officer, got drunk and stole some fajitas). Newsom then baffled many critics by appointing a former city supervisor, Annemarie Conroy, who had no emergency-management experience but whose father once held the same job. Newsom, though, has made emergency planning visible in a way his predecessor, Willie Brown, did not (he even kicked off his term with a meeting on emergency preparedness). And his new disaster boss has won over many doubters, hiring an ex–fire chief as her deputy and adopting a number of the grand jury's recommendations. Still, San Francisco's pricey real-estate market has forced most of the city's police, fire, and emergency workers to live outside the city, in many cases across a bridge that is vulnerable to collapse. And, when a tsunami alert crawled across area television screens a few months ago, Conroy's office received the official warning an hour later—via teletype.

OF COURSE, WHILE preparing for a disaster's aftermath is good, avoiding it altogether, or at least minimizing losses, is better. In New Orleans, this would have meant strengthening the levees; in San Francisco, it means hardening flawed buildings, bridges, and highways so they hold together during the ten or 15 seconds of tremors that can launch cars straight into the air and make skyscrapers twist and sway like tall grass. It is these preparations—costlier than revising phone trees or drawing up evacuation routes—that would save the most lives in an earthquake. But, despite billions of dollars in public and private investment, the Bay Area remains troublingly insecure. In 2000, San Francisco's building department commissioned an extensive study from the Applied Technology Council, a nonprofit engineering consultancy. After a long delay, a final report is scheduled to be released to the public later this year. It will compile an exacting profile of San Francisco's privately owned built environment and then run the model through four credible earthquake scenarios—from a 6.9 tremor along the East Bay's Hayward fault to the infamous Big One, a 7.9 shake along the coastal San Andreas fault comparable to the one that destroyed San Francisco in 1906—adding up costs and casualties by neighborhood.

A late draft of the report describes Katrina-like devastation or worse: anywhere from 2,674 injured, 114 killed, and more than 30,000 displaced in a Hayward quake to 18,642 injured, 1,224 killed, and more than 320,000 displaced in the worst possible San Andreas rupture. That is for San Francisco alone. The report's best-case scenario puts the city's economic losses to homes and businesses at more than $12 billion; at worst, nearly $40 billion. Those figures will climb after public damage (from bridges to highways) and potentially catastrophic fire damage are taken into account. Oakland will likely be in worse shape; there, softer soil, greater poverty, and a larger number of unreinforced brick and concrete buildings make the city far more vulnerable to a severe quake. Nearby Berkeley has made significant gains with an innovative tax incentive that encourages home buyers to order up seismic improvements, but it shares Oakland's natural disadvantages. And any disruption to San Jose's hive of

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technology firms would have economic repercussions for the entire country.

Engineers agree that most casualties will occur in just two types of buildings: soft-story housing, where several floors of apartments are lofted over garage space, and large brick or concrete structures. But owners of large concrete and soft-story structures, many of which contain low- and moderate-income housing, are left to make improvements at their discretion. Financially, most are better off doing nothing. These buildings will end up condemned after any serious earthquake regardless of safety enhancements; retrofits will simply make them less likely to crush people inside.

Even for first responders, the biggest problems could stem more from faulty engineering than faulty emergency plans. The 1994 earthquake in Northridge exposed many of the state's hospitals as dangerously vulnerable to structural failure. In response, the state Assembly passed a law in 2000 requiring all hospitals to be earthquake-proof, but the costs were so high (an estimated $24 billion) that legislators allowed them 30 years to comply. In the meantime, "How would we prevent a large number of injuries from turning into fatalities?" asks Richard Andrews, a private consultant and longtime director of California's Office of Emergency Services.

Perhaps the greatest symbol of California's structural shortcomings is the Bay Bridge, which lost part of its upper deck in San Francisco's severe 1989 quake. A marvel in its day, the bridge is now dangerously unsound, with the easternmost 1.5 miles anchored in deep mud. City and state planners opted to replace the eastern span, at an estimated cost of $6.3 billion, rather than retrofit it, but construction stalled for years, as competing political interests squabbled over details like bike lanes and a decorative tower. Construction won't be finished until 2012 at the earliest, more than two decades after inspectors deemed the existing bridge unsafe.

And now, after New Orleans's catastrophic flooding, Northern California's confidence in its 1,100 miles of fragile levees—which extend northeast from the San Francisco Bay to Sacramento—is beginning to look misplaced. Not only are parts of this 1,600-square-mile delta a good 30 feet below sea level; and not only does its network of levees control the water supply for California's agriculture industry and every city in the southern half of the state, but the Hayward fault also runs right underneath. And, according to Jeffrey Mount, director of the Center for Watershed Sciences at the University of California–Davis, developers have proposed building 100,000 new homes on a flood plain between the East Bay and the state capital that any severe levee breech, due to a storm or an earthquake, would turn into a lake. "It might not be this generation, it might be the next generation, but there will be extraordinary suffering as these urban areas flood just the way they did in New Orleans," Mount says. Water supply to more than half the state would likely halt for months, or longer.

California, with its powerful economy, would rebuild after a Big One, perhaps more easily than New Orleans will. But Katrina's aftermath offers a terrifying glimpse of how California's low-income citizens could fare if FEMA's prophecy comes to pass. Their homes will be the first to collapse, and their neighborhoods, many of them built on the region's softest soil, will be arduous for rescue teams to navigate. They will be the least likely to have friends and relatives far from the city to take them in, and they will be the most likely to require public shelter. Only 13 percent of homeowners, disproportionately affluent, have purchased costly and extremely limited earthquake insurance from the state (the private insurance industry pulled out after the Northridge quake, when they paid for half of the recovery). And much of the city's affordable housing will simply never return. Roughly one-quarter of the city's low- and moderate-income homes disappeared after the 1989 earthquake; landlords are no longer bound by rent-control laws if their buildings need substantial renovation, and, if they collapse, there are far more profitable uses for the land.

Katrina has shown that disasters will not wait for a community to finish shoring up against them, nor will crises wait for cities to mark up their crisis plans. And, unfortunately, the federal government cannot be counted on to step in and help when local efforts are overwhelmed. The Applied Technology Council report will give San Francisco planners an opportunity. When the Building Department commissioned the study, it intended to use the findings to target legislation and investment where it can have the greatest impact. Already, the city mandates upgrades to unstable brick buildings. Officials could take a similar approach to high-occupancy concrete or soft-story housing, where preventing a collapse would save hundreds of lives. They could even require landlords to disclose a building's seismic soundness to its residents, finally giving owners of affordable housing an incentive to renovate their property.

Of course, crises—even those of Katrina's magnitude—do not always spur change; if Katrina illustrates anything, it is that governments are seldom willing or able to commit astronomical sums to fight dangers that may never materialize. Americans have always been a little too comfortable with risk. But they have less tolerance for loss, and officials across the country will not soon forget the public's angry hunt for culprits after Katrina. That may be enough to prompt a surge of interest and activity in San Francisco and the state House. Emergency preparedness requires constant study and coordination, but a single season of new planning and building laws, or a brief wave of investment in the state's most vulnerable spots, could leave residents safer for decades, even if public and political attention wanes. If FEMA's prediction comes to pass, it would be nice if the aftermath of the third disaster doesn't look like the first two. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Tribulations New and Old

THE HUMAN RACE AMUSES John le Carré in a melancholy way. He picks up the globe and turns it pensively, noting places where Britons—the species he knows best—are caught in contrasts, between bright plans and lesser finishes, between outer gloss and inner shadow. His aim is not satire but irony. Here is an instance. A British diplomat named Woodrow goes to the office of a colleague named Quayle to tell him that Mrs. Quayle has been murdered. The colleague greets him casually. Then: "The famous golden voice, thought Woodrow, noticing every detail as if it were fresh to him. Tarnished by time but guaranteed to enchant, as long as you prefer tone to substance. Why am I despising you when I'm about to change your life?" Which Woodrow then does.

THE CONSTANT GARDENER
(Focus)

FINDING ELÉAZAR
(Banks)

This passage is from **THE CONSTANT GARDENER**, the latest le Carré novel to reach the screen, and it illustrates why his novels are hard to adapt. In the film the moment cited above is played straight, no internals. Woodrow tells Quayle, and Quayle reacts. We lose the secret counterpoint. Throughout the film, we get the plot, which is, as expected, intelligently engrossing, but the le Carré timbre is missing.

Paradoxically, Jeffrey Caine's adaptation of *The Constant Gardener*, though it loses the counterpoint, does le Carré a favor. The novel is bloated. It takes pages and pages to reach its theme, and there are scenes rendered in detail that don't add much to the narrative. The screenplay slims the book down. Novels are usually condensed for the screen, not always helpfully. Here condensation helps.

Le Carré's villain, since he can no longer call up the Cold War, is a cartel of pharmaceutical giants who are covertly using Africa as a testing lab for a new TB drug. Many patients, all of them black, are dying, though they think they are being cured. The setting is, principally, Kenya. The protagonist, Justin Quayle, is on the staff of the British High Commission in Nairobi. He has recently married in England and has brought his wife, Tessa, with him. Justin knows that his wife is politically leftist, but lately he has learned how passionate her social engagement is. She is committed to exploring the drug cartel's activities, and she has brought Justin to knowledge of the cartel's skullduggery and to the dangers in that knowledge.

But it is misleading to put the story in chronological order. One of the best elements in the adaptation is Caine's blending, like le Carré's, of the past and the present so that one can enrich the other. There are no stilted flashbacks: both past and present are treated as present, which gives the film a texture of depth.

The director, Fernando Meirelles, the Brazilian best known for *City of God*, handles this combination deftly, and with the aid of his editor, Claire Simpson, moves the film forward in a time-encompassing swirl. Meirelles overdoes the handheld-camera shots to suggest nervous energy, but at least he uses this energy to mix colors—the kaleidoscopic spectrum of a Nairobi market, for instance, and the cold-in-the-nose shade of rainy London. The cinematographer, César Charlone, who did *City of God*, displays his skill early. At the start, Justin Quayle is at the Nairobi airport saying goodbye to Tessa, who is going up country with a friend. As Tessa and the man walk toward the plane, the whole airport fades to white, leaving Justin alone in the foreground. It is a startling instance of the camera itself predicting theme.

The two leading actors are splendid. Rachel Weisz, beautiful but offhand about it, plays Tessa with sex and flounce that make the woman's gravity all the more credible. Ralph Fiennes plays Justin and fulfills the role with the quiet strength of a talent that need not prove itself; it just functions. Fiennes gives us the coilings in Justin as he learns of his wife's activities and of the drug cartel's brutal moves to stop her and her friends. In 1995 Fiennes played Hamlet on Broadway, and though the company and the directing were poor, he showed that he has a Hamlet in him. I remembered it in the moment when Justin learns of his wife's death. Meirelles, with confidence, focuses on Justin's face in close-up as he hears the news. We see very little. We feel a good deal.

All the cast are exactly what we might have hoped for. Especially right is Bill Nighy as a silken British official. This character figures in a last sequence that Caine has added to le Carré. As in the novel, Justin's story finishes with the bleakness that he himself has been seeking, but the film adds a coda that underscores the bleakness and also nourishes the vindictive in us.

Note: film critics have received an e-mail message from a group representing the pharmaceutical industry, asking us—before we review *The Constant Gardener*—to consider the reality of that industry's activities in Africa and elsewhere. Obediently, I have considered the facts in the message and also have considered le Carré's statement about his book: "As my journey through the pharmaceutical jungle progressed, I came to realize that, by comparison with the reality, my story was as tame as a holiday postcard." I note, too, the e-mail's point that "from 1998 to 2003, the pharmaceutical industry donated $4.1 billion ... to improve global health." The email says nothing about the prices of drugs that made those billions available.

A pleasant oddity. The American tenor Neil Shicoff, an opera house stalwart around the world, decided a few years ago to promote a production of Jacques Fromental Halévy's opera *La Juive*, first done in 1835. The story centers on anti-Semitism in fifteenth-century Constance,

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and the leading male role is a pious Jew. Shicoff, the son of a cantor, has considerable interest in his Jewishness, and he thought that the role of the sore-beset Rabbi Eléazar (once a Caruso triumph) would suit his voice and temperament. Shicoff and friends decided to make a documentary about his preparation of the role and the progress toward the production. The result, FINDING ELÉAZAR, directed by Paula Heil Fisher, is a bit scattery, but it simmers with Shicoff's intensity in lending his faith and being to the role. (A section in the middle, where Shicoff records some of the great aria, "Rachel, quand du Seigneur," was directed by Sidney Lumet, who is briefly seen conferring with Shicoff.)

The premiere of this production, the return to light of this once popular work that had been suppressed by the Nazis, took place in, of all cities, Vienna in 1999. (It later played at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.) The film begins with this premiere, then goes back to show the journey that led to it. Of the opera production itself, which was in modern dress, we see very little. We do at last hear Shicoff do the great aria in full—and thrillingly.

The libretto of *La Juive* came from the breathtakingly prolific Eugène Scribe, and it writhes in Scribean melodrama. The composer, Halévy, now obscure, was a luminary in his time. (He was Georges Bizet's teacher and father-in-law.) Shicoff has returned a staunch opera to the stage—there have been and will be further performances in various places—and he has made an intimate film about an opera singer–actor working his way into a character. ■

James Wood
Mr. Literature

EDMUND WILSON:
A LIFE IN LITERATURE
By Lewis M. Dabney
(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 642 pp., $35)

I.

IN THE PHOTOGRAPH BY IRVING Penn, he stares remorselessly at his fashionable torturer. He is sixty-five, and looks every day of it. Two sparse claws of sandy hair lie on the back of his head, leaving a large dense unencumbered brow. His small eyes, alive with irritable clarity, look sore and weary: they are multiply rimmed. The heavy jowls are at once mannish and babyish, like his down-turned mouth, a fallen crescent. The strong broad chin, exactly his mother's, pushes forward to confront the weaker world. He looks confident, uncomfortable, impatient, and sourly lucid.

When Edmund Wilson sat for Penn in 1960, most of his great work was behind him: *Axel's Castle* (1931), that still superbly clear-eyed introduction to Symbolism and the modernism that was its child; the long, pioneering essays on Pushkin, Dickens, Kipling, Wharton, and Hemingway, collected in *The Triple Thinkers* (1938) and *The Wound and The Bow* (1941); and *To the Finland Station* (1940), a massive and spacious account of radical thought from Vico and Michelet to Marx and Lenin. The four years between 1938 and 1941, in which Wilson published those last three books, must constitute the greatest period of critical productivity in American letters, and one of the greatest periods of creative productivity, too.

In these early books, Wilson had established his characteristic personality and intellectual temperament. Isaiah Berlin, one of Wilson's friends, once remarked that other critics writing at this time wrote "just intelligent sentences," while Wilson's, which came out of his discomfort with himself, were always "filled with some kind of personal content." Wilson's criticism is marked by its eighteenth-century robustness, by its glinting, pugnacious clarity, by its need to turn analysis into narrative, by its exhaustive and sometimes exhausting scholarship, and by the tense, prosaic music of its sentences.

It can, at first, seem like a flat style, one unfit for permanent criticism—which lasts, after all, only if it, too, becomes literature. The abundant literary journalism, often written weekly for this magazine and for *The New Yorker*, has at times a hasty lusterlessness, but Wilson polished and revised the literary portraits that filled his books, and often we find a beautifully restrained and classically elegant expository prose. The chapter on Proust, from *Axel's Castle*, is an astonishing thirty-page summary of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, and ends with a paragraph that used to be famous:

> Proust is perhaps the last great historian of the loves, the society, the intelligence, the diplomacy, the literature and the art of the Heartbreak House of capitalist culture; and the little man with the sad appealing voice, the metaphysician's mind, the Saracen's beak, the ill-fitting dress-shirt and the great eyes that seem to see all about him like the many-faceted eyes of a fly, dominates the scene and plays host in the mansion where he is not long to be master.

Finer still, perhaps, are the closing words of Wilson's portrait of Oliver Wendell Holmes, from *Patriotic Gore* in 1962, his last great book, in which he discusses Justice Holmes's famous bequest of his entire fortune to the government of the United States:

> He had fought for the Union; he had mastered its laws; he had served in its highest court through a period of three decades. The American Constitution was, as he came to declare, an "experiment"—what was to come of our democratic society it was impossible for a philosopher to tell—but he had taken responsibility for its working, he had subsisted and achieved his fame through his tenure of the place it had given him; and he returned to the treasury of the Union the little that he had to leave.

Wilson several times called himself a man of the eighteenth century, and one can hear in the balanced periods, the long semi-colons, and the finely paradoxical compression—"plays host in the mansion where he is not long to be master"; "returned to the treasury of the Union the little that he had to leave"—both Gibbon and Johnson. And behind them is the Latin of Tacitus and Cicero: this is how, until quite recently, if not with such eloquence, English classics teachers of the old school used to write

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their term reports, and Wilson, almost uniquely among American literary journalists, had a solid training in Greek and Latin, languages which he maintained throughout his life. The tendency to defer the verb and object, to wave them on to the middle or end of the line, to interrupt the shapely sentence with subordinate and prepositional clauses, is clearly Latinate: "The abstractions of German philosophy, which may seem to us unmeaning or clumsy if we encounter them in English or French, convey in German, through their capitalized solidity, almost the impression of primitive gods. They are substantial, and yet they are a kind of pure beings; they are abstract, and yet they nourish." Gibbon, with a greater, more silvery exhibitionism, does the same thing:

> While Petrarch indulged these prophetic visions, the Roman hero was fast declining from the meridian of fame and power; and the people, who had gazed with astonishment on the ascending meteor, began to mark the irregularity of its course, and the vicissitudes of light and obscurity. More eloquent than judicious, more enterprising than resolute, the faculties of Rienzi were not balanced by cool and commanding reason; he magnified in a tenfold proportion the objects of hope and fear; and prudence, which could not have erected, did not presume to fortify, his throne.

WILSON DISLIKED THE KIND of piecemeal quoting I am doing. He called it "anthologizing," and his own prose, built of solid blocks of exegesis and description, is correspondingly difficult to parcel up. Unlike, say, Randall Jarrell—or Hazlitt, or Woolf—he had almost no interest in witty or metaphorical one-liners. In his essay, "Is Verse a Dying Technique?" he rebukes Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot for their habit of selecting a line or two of a poet's work, so making fetishistic touchstones of these now "anthologized" poets: "The old critic, when he reads the classic, epic, eclogue, tale, or play, may have grasped it and enjoyed it as a whole; yet when the reader reads the comment of the critic, he gets the impression ... that the *Divine Comedy*, say, so extraordinarily sustained and so beautifully integrated, is remarkable mainly for Eliot-like fragments."

Wilson's method was likewise to eschew the fragmentary, to strive for integration, and it is both a strength and a weakness in his work. He wrote a huge essay, such as the one on Dickens, which is almost 25,000 words long, by reading everything, and then by clearing an exegetical path through the many large novels in order to turn Dickens's career into a story, comprised of biography and description. For the kind of summarizing and conclusive portraits Wilson did, this method is majestically good, and truly makes of him an heir to Johnson and Macaulay. He seems to rear panoptically above his subjects, like a statue overseeing a city square, sternly, anciently surveying the busy activity, compressing and elucidating vast amounts of mobile information. John Berryman joked that whenever one met Wilson he was always "working his way through the oeuvre" of some writer or other. His letters become rather wearisome to read because of his need to whale his correspondents with his learning; as someone in the Goncourt journals remarks about a minor French writer, "Yes, yes, he has talent, but he doesn't know how to make people forgive him for having it."

A LETTER TO GILBERT HIGHET, after the publication of the latter's *The Classical Tradition* in 1949, runs to many pages, and sixteen numbered points: "2. I think that there is something more to the influence of Virgil on Dante than your account of it indicates ... 3. You say, on page 79, that Dante makes Statius a Christian 'doubtless because of the medieval tradition of his conversion' ... But apparently no such tradition is known." And this was an admiring letter. A typical missive to Lionel Trilling, written in 1953, proceeds thus: "Not only George Orwell but Eliot has been under the delusion that runcible is not a real word. I suppose you know that a runcible spoon was a three-tined spoon (I think, three) for extracting pickles from jars ... Have you ever gone into [Edward] Lear aside from his nonsense rhymes? I think he is very attractive, and I do hope some day to write about him." As late as 1971 (he died a year later), he was writing to Erich Segal: "Thank you very much for the Plautus ... You have been extremely successful in catching the sense and following the meter ... I don't quite like 'Greeking it up,' 'Boozing it up,' etc. (Wouldn't 'going Greek' be better?)" And to Angus Wilson in the same year: "I enjoyed your book on Dickens. I suppose that you have discovered that an illustration by Catermole is attributed to Cruickshank." And to Vladimir Nabokov, with whom he had quarreled over Pushkin, Wilson wrote, also in 1971: "I am just now getting together a volume of my Russian articles. I am correcting my errors in Russian in my piece on Nabokov-Pushkin; but citing a few more of your ineptitudes."

He admired the independence of a historian such as Michelet, or the much more scattered learning of an American oddity such as John Jay Chapman. Though he taught occasionally—a course on Dickens at Chicago, a term at Princeton, and some lectures at Harvard—he disliked lecturing, and was not very good at it, and his career was conducted, during the great era of the encroaching university, in prickly independence from academia. What he wrote about Michelet, in *To the Finland Station*, can also be applied to himself: "The impression he makes on us is quite different from that of the ordinary modern scholar who has specialized in some narrowly delimited subject and gotten it up in a graduate school: we feel that Michelet has read all the books, been to look at all the monuments and pictures, interviewed personally all the authorities, and explored all the libraries and archives of Europe; and that he has it all under his hat." Occasionally one wishes that Wilson would keep his hat on.

WILSON'S GRAND, ALL-seeing approach, while ideal for narrative, is a weakness in literary criticism. He was never drawn to the kind of close textual reading that was going on around him in and out of the universities, and his unwillingness to quote from the texts that he is discussing gives his criticism, at times, a rather synoptic voraciousness, as if texts exist to be paraphrased and summarized, to be crushed into clarifying prose. In his

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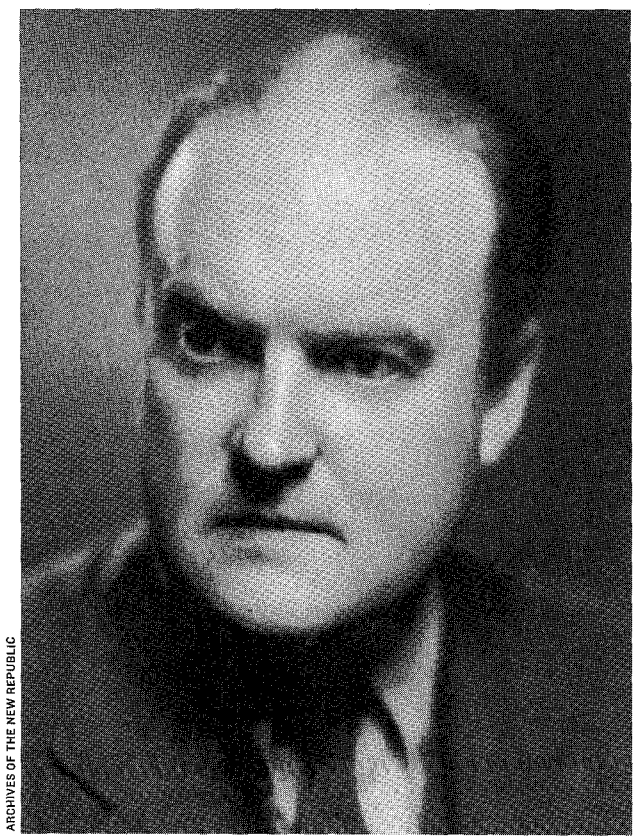
essay, "Seeing Chekhov Plain," one of his weakest, he argues, without much evidence, that Chekhov's late stories were attempting to cover the whole of Russian society, like Balzac's novels did France. He briskly marches through several of Chekhov's most exquisite tales:

> *Peasants* is a study of the peasant world, which Chekhov is far from idealizing ... A peasant from the *izba*, who has bettered himself to the extent of becoming a waiter in Moscow, falls ill and returns with a wife and child to his family in the village ... In a companion piece, *In the Ravine*, Chekhov deals with the brutalizing influence of the kulak, prosperous peasant, class. In this somewhat better-off family, the shopkeeper father sells bad meat, one of his sons passes bad money, and an enterprising daughter-in-law, who is building a brickyard on her father-in-law's land and who fears that she may be deprived of it, eliminates the infant grandson to whom he proposes to leave it by scalding him to death with boiling water ... In *The Bishop*, the next-to-last story that Chekhov lived to complete, he fixes on his slide a specimen of the not quite diseased yet not very vigorous tissue of the Greek Orthodox Church: a dying peasant priest, who has risen above the level of his parents but now finds he has nobody close to him ... In these, and in the stories that immediately precede them, are presented a variety of other types of peasants, ex-peasants, and the lower middle class that were called in Russia *meshchane*, together with doctors, professors, petty provincial officials, and—given the full-scale treatment in *The Duel* of 1891—the pretentious and inept intelligentsia.

It is true that Wilson was trying, in such hard descriptions, to counter the Anglo-American idea of Chekhov, then prevalent, as a misty poet of dreamy despair. Yet the lack of attention to detail, in a writer whose greatness rests supremely on his use of detail, the unwillingness to talk of fiction as if narrative were a special kind of aesthetic experience and not a reducible proposition, the conversion of the complicated long story "The Duel" into what sounds like a mere exposé of intellectuals, is rather scandalous. One reads Wilson on Chekhov without any sense that beauty is involved, or that the critic wants to account for it. One feels only that yet another writer has been mastered. The "specimen" Wilson refers to—an unfortunate metaphor to use in connection with "The Bishop," which is so full of Chekhovian tenderness and sympathy—is not Chekhov's bishop, but Chekhov himself, who is here being used to fulfill an ideological requirement of comprehensiveness.



ARCHIVES OF THE NEW REPUBLIC

Edmund Wilson in the 1930s

II.

LEWIS DABNEY'S FINE, HIGHLY capable new biography is the best picture we now have of Wilson's massive and many-chaptered career. Dabney, who edited Wilson's journal *The Sixties*, and who probably knows more about his subject than anyone alive, is an intelligent guide, who quotes extensively from the letters and the journals. He clings a little too closely to this handrail, one feels: his narrative rarely lifts away from its subject, rarely dares generalities. There is little attempt to place Wilson in the larger critical tradition to which he obviously belongs, and one has almost no sense, while reading the book, that other critics, as talented as or perhaps more talented than Wilson, were simultaneously at work: Randall Jarrell, V. S. Pritchett, Lionel Trilling, and William Empson surely come to mind. Dabney's book may not be surpassed, but the studious reader will need to supplement the rich factual provender of the book with the more atmospheric sketches provided by Wilson's own letters (selected by his last wife and Daniel Aaron in *Letters on Literature and Politics*).

Dabney, for instance, is a thorough historian of Wilson's family origins, but he misses a chance to show how the first twenty years of Wilson's life decisively established his critical aesthetic. Three men influenced Edmund Wilson's youth and constructed his sensibility: his father; the nineteenth-century French historian Hippolyte Taine, whom Wilson read as a teenager, and whose *History of English Literature* was the first criticism he ever read; and Christian Gauss, the teacher of Dante and Flaubert whom he encountered as a student at Princeton, and with whom he corresponded until Gauss's death. It might be said that, among many things, Wilson received, respectively, from these three: an abiding interest in, and personal involvement with, neurotic collapse; a sense that literature should above all be accounted for historically; and a deep, neoclassical suspicion, amounting to an incomprehension, of romanticism.

One of Wilson's finest essays is "The Author at Sixty," a portrait not really of the writer but of his father. It is written with Wilson's lovely stern objectivity; the impulse is not to bathe in memory, but to see his father whole, to comprehend him as Pushkin or Marx or John Jay Chapman are also comprehended. Edmund Wilson Sr. was a successful trial lawyer who became attorney general of New Jersey, and who was once sounded

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out for a Supreme Court position by President Wilson. But like Virginia Woolf's father, though much more drastically, he was a neurotic, who had a breakdown in mid-life and never quite functioned properly again. He was learned, severe, hypochondriacal, and inaccessible. "He was undoubtedly a very self-centered man, and, when sunk in his neurotic periods, would be shut in some inner prison where he was quite beyond communication," wrote his son.

These periods of withdrawal could last as long as a year, broken only by his wife's insistence that he take on another case, to fill the family coffers. As a lawyer, the elder Wilson was formidable, and his son reckoned that the success had partly to do with rhetorical power and with imperturbable confidence, traits that he himself would inherit: "The reason for his success was undoubtedly that he never undertook a case which he did not think he could win, and that his judgment about this was infallible. He would cause [the jury] to live through the events of the crime or supposed crime, he would take them through the steps of the transaction, whatever that was, and he would lodge in their heads a picture that it was difficult for his opponent to expel."

His son, who had a breakdown at the same age his father was first afflicted, would develop what amounts to a theory about the connection between artistic production and personal suffering—"the wound and the bow"—and would become expert at lodging in the minds of his readers "a picture" of his subjects. It was a talent that both Taine and Gauss possessed, too. Wilson discovered Taine's book, in translation, on his father's shelves. From the first, he was enthralled by his mixture of belletristic criticism and biographical verve—the way, for instance, Taine began his chapter on Swift (in Van Laun's translation):

> In 1685, in the great hall of Dublin University, the professors engaged in examining for the bachelor's degree enjoyed a singular spectacle: a poor scholar, odd, awkward, with hard blue eyes, an orphan, friendless, poorly supported by the charity of an uncle, having failed once before to take his degree on account of his ignorance of logic, had come up again without having condescended to read logic ... and the professors went away, doubtless with pitying smiles, lamenting the feeble brain of Jonathan Swift.

Taine's French positivism involved studying works of literature "scientifically," by setting them in their historical and biological context—in what he called "*la race, le milieu et le moment.*" Though Wilson did not subscribe as faithfully as Taine to a belief in the causative powers of history and race, he employed such categories when it suited him (particularly when writing about Russians). Like Taine, he believed that literature could be studied as a "specimen"—that word used by Wilson to describe Chekhov's dying bishop—and he learned from the French tradition the importance of clear, objective scrutiny.

Born just inside the nineteenth century, in 1895, Wilson was a man both of that epoch and of the eighteenth century, and in some ways he remained fiercely loyal to his background. Just as his father, in later years, had taken to spending time alone in the old family house, in Talcotville, New York, so his son, in his later years, would spend bookish weeks alone in Talcotville, despite the hostility and the absence of his wife. He loved Swift, as Taine did, and like Taine he had a tendency, reinforced by his education at Princeton, to condescend to Wordsworth and Shelley, using the more classical Goethe and Dante as sticks with which to chastise the Romantics' spilt religion. Just as George Saintsbury, the breezy Victorian scholar of English literature whom Wilson read as a young man, disdained George Eliot, so Wilson would confess to never having read *Middlemarch*.

He encountered Christian Gauss in his final year at Princeton, and wrote a fine memoir of him after his death. Gauss was a greatly learned professor of French and Italian, born in Michigan to German parents. "He seemed to be able to summon almost anything he wanted in prose or verse, as if he were taking down the book from the shelf," wrote his distinguished pupil. He transmitted to Wilson a lifelong love of Dante, and a neoclassical aesthetic. "Shakespeare was not one of the authors whom Christian had lived in or on; and he always made us feel that that sort of thing [Shakespeare's messiness] would never come up to literature that was polished and carefully planned and that knew how to make its points and the meaning of the points it was making." Likewise, Wilson never gives the impression of one who lives in, or on, Shakespeare. Virgil, Dante, and Flaubert were his great navigators. "This non-English, this classical and Latin ideal, became indissolubly associated in our minds with the summits of literature," he writes in his memoir.

Faithfully, Wilson would use this "non-English, this classical and Latin ideal" as a standard by which to judge much literature. It is how he thought Flaubert should be read, thus squeezing the romanticism out of that writer, and he rather strangely praised Henry James for "his classical equanimity in dealing with diverse forces ... his combination, equally classical, of hard realism with formal harmony." He disliked the romantic aestheticism in Arnold and Eliot's criticism, and he liked in Michelet that "he gave the world, not as his romantic contemporaries did, personal exaltations and despairs swollen to heroic volume, but the agonizing drama of the emergence of the modern world out of feudalism." He would read Marx as perhaps the ideal nineteenth-century romantic, a child of the Enlightenment who united rationalism and a properly submerged personal struggle. Most happily, Wilson would rightly find in Pushkin, whose greatness he pressed on a largely ignorant Anglo-Saxon world, a Mozartean blend of the classical and romantic.

If we were to use Taine's categories of milieu and moment, we would have to admit that when Wilson left Princeton in 1916, European and American modernism had found its ideal critic. As modernist writing would draw some of its chastened lyricism from the trauma of the Great War, so Wilson, who served in the hospitals in France, dressing the wounds of men whose genitals had been burned by mustard gas, would be deeply affected by his wartime experience. At Princeton, the young man had added French to his Greek and Latin, and this would enable him to trace a line from the aestheticism of Mallarmé and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam to Proust, Eliot, and Joyce. Above all, modernism's own classicism, its formal rigor and allusive snobberies, its Homeric and Virgilian aspirations, would fall right into the lap of a young critic with deep historical eyesight and his own distrust of "personality."

So began the two great decades of Wilson's career, first at *Vanity Fair*, and then, from 1925 and through the 1930s, at The New Republic. Dabney is an excellent guide to these packed years, show-

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ing how Wilson moved between relentless amounts of work and equally relentless eroticism. (He did not lose his virginity until he was twenty-five, to Edna St. Vincent Millay; but he made up for lost time in the next decade.) Nowadays, as we run around town yelling about reviewer's "snark," it is invigorating to be reminded of how steely and objective Wilson was as a critic, and how the writers he pressed to give the best of themselves came to rely on the critic's clear-running judgment.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, a Princeton classmate, received harsh criticism for *This Side of Paradise*, but wrote to Wilson that "I am guilty of its every stricture and I take an extraordinary delight in its considered approbation." Wilson, Dabney tells us, wrote the first review in America of Hemingway's work, in 1924, and would write with great insight over the next twenty years about this novelist. The two became friendly, but this would not stop Wilson from severely criticizing Hemingway's masculinist fantasies. Yet Hemingway, like Faulkner after a similar bruising, eventually wrote to Wilson in a spirit of solidarity. None of them went to quite the lengths of Anaïs Nin, who slept with Wilson in order to win his critical approval of her work. Fitzgerald probably spoke for many when he called Wilson the literary conscience of the age.

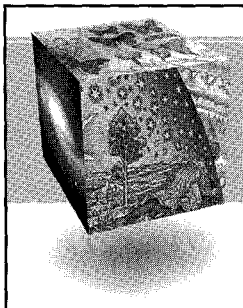
Most impressive, perhaps, were Wilson's early reviews of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses*. He would go on to defend Joyce in particular (Eliot's conservative politics irritated him), and to write wonderfully about *Finnegans Wake*, seeing in that book a new Joycean lyricism. Wilson was always independent, but in modernism he had found his creed, or it had found him. He was blindfolded, like Justice herself, so that he could see beyond the Manhattan horizon. His criticism, at once partisan and Olympian, manages the extraordinary feat of being disinterestedly interested.

III.

THE OTHER CREED THAT FOUND Wilson was Marxism. Dabney does not underplay Wilson's infatuation with radical politics, but he neglects the way it permeated, and sometimes badly distorted, many of his literary judgments. What, after all, is Shaw's *Heartbreak House* doing in that final paragraph about Proust from *Axel's Castle*? ("Proust is perhaps the last great historian of the loves, the society, the intelligence, the diplomacy, the literature and the art of the Heartbreak House of capitalist culture....") And when he concludes, "... dominates the scene and plays host in the mansion where he is not long to be master," did this final sentence about Proust not encode a kind of revolutionary threat?

Wilson's radical politics had a long literary afterlife, too. Many years after he had drifted away from any belief in Marxism's survival in Soviet Russia, long after he had become disgusted by the show trials and exterminations and censorship, his notion of literature was apt to be skewed by his old loyalties. His long essay on Chekhov, written in 1952, is an example in which Chekhov is turned out as a writer who usefully shows us scenes of peasant life and the idiocies of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. His essay on Flaubert, published in 1938, is bizarrely determined to see the novelist as a kind of unconscious Marxist: "In his novels, it is never the nobility—indistinguishable for mediocrity from the bourgeois—but the peasants and working people whom he habitually uses as touchstones to show up the pretensions of the bourgeois." That anachronistic phrase, "working people," surely alerts us to the degree of distortion here. Wilson, who as Dabney admits, believed in literature as a force for betterment, can at times sound like the much more orthodox Marxist, Georg Lukacs, who was writing at the same time about the bourgeois novel.

In Wilson's forced reading, *Madame Bovary* becomes an attack on capitalist nostalgia: "What cuts Flaubert off from the other romantics and makes him primarily a social critic is his grim realization of the futility of [Emma's] dreaming about the splendors of the Orient and the brave old days of the past as an antidote to bourgeois society ... She will not face her situation as it is, and the result is that she is eventually undone by the realities she has been trying to ignore." That last rather moralistic sentence reminds us of the brutally summarizing Wilson, the Wilson who will happily gut a living novelistic organism with the blunt blade of précis. In this case, his classical resistance to Flaubert's romanticism combines with his worthy political belief that Flaubert ought to be on the



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side of the good, to blind him to the quality of ironic nullification, the conservative misanthropy that is so disturbing in Flaubert.

Wilson is determined to see something "positive" and "objective" in Flaubert, as he rightly found many positive elements in Dickens. These socialist loyalties would obstruct, at times, his friendship with Nabokov. When the Russian complained, in 1946, that André Malraux, Wilson's newest literary "find," was not a great novelist, Wilson confidently replied that "Silone and Malraux now emerge, I think, as the masters of the political-social-moral semi-Marxist school of fiction that is the great development in its field since the analytical psychological novel." Wilson was bringing the cultural news. But one can only imagine what Nabokov thought of the headlines: "the political-social-moral semi-Marxist school of fiction," indeed.

THE FRUIT OF WILSON'S INterest in communism was his great history of radical thought, *To the Finland Station*, which he began in 1934 and finished in 1940. It began life as a series of articles for THE NEW REPUBLIC on Vico, Michelet, Taine, Fourier, Marx, Engels, and Trotsky. The labor involved was prodigious; Louise Bogan wrote to a friend about counting eighty-six volumes of Michelet's writings lined up on a shelf in Wilson's study. Wilson visited Russia in 1935, and in the next two years taught himself both Russian and German. There is something very moving about Wilson's independence, his erotic curiosity for knowledge—though the conquistador of knowledge, bedding one fact after another, becomes tiresome after a while. Wilson moved out of New York, to Stamford, where most of the book was written, and as late as 1939 he is writing to Trilling to ask him to find, in a New York library, Marx's pamphlet on Palmerston.

To the Finland Station is still an enthralling book. Wilson conveys, with something approaching joy, the experience of reading Michelet, or *Das Kapital*, or Trotsky's history of the revolution. The book is full of vivid portraits, which are etched like woodcuts: Marx and his family, evicted from their Soho lodgings; Engels, and his almost French liveliness and buoyant rationalism; Trotsky, with his amazing confidence, sitting in prison and posing for a photograph, "not abashed, not indignant, hardly even defiant, but like the head of a great state who has still at a time of crisis to give the photographer a moment." Wilson is aflame with the idea, now perhaps too obviously naïve, that Marxism is the great second flowering of the Enlightenment, and that Marxism-Leninism still holds the possibility of founding, in Russia, the first "truly human" society.

Of course, the book is also spiked with premonition, for Wilson could now see, despite his own golden reports during his visit, that Stalin's Russia was far from being a truly human society. Little jabs of warning protrude like fingerposts every so often: "So the Communists of the Third International, leaving history to the dialectical demiurge, have acquiesced in the despotism of Stalin while he was uprooting Russian Marxism itself." Or: "There are many respects in which Marx and Engels may be contrasted with the crude pedants and fanatics who have pretended to speak for the movement which Marx and Engels started." But Wilson believed that it was not Marxism so much as something rotten in the Russian system, even the Russian psyche, that was to blame. "The problem is not Marxism but the incompatibility of certain national psychologies to Marxism," he wrote to John Dos Passos, who, as Dabney points out, was the most clear-eyed of all American observers of the Russian disaster. As Paul Berman has shown, Wilson had come under the tutelage of the historian Max Eastman, for whom the culprit was Marx's mysticism, and for whom Lenin was a hero. This explains the willful romanticizing of Lenin at the end of Wilson's book, who is seen as the gentlest and most selfless of men, a lover of Beethoven and *War and Peace* who once, Wilson moistly reports, refused to shoot a fox because he thought it "beautiful." A pity then, wrote Nabokov tartly, that Russia was homely.

Wilson could see that it was psychologically credulous of Marx to believe that when the proletariat took over it would simply be on its best behavior. What was the evidence for this? asked Wilson. Why would the worker not want what the capitalist plutocrat had had? Marx, reflects Wilson, "did not know the United States," and thus begins four glorious pages, in which Wilson's difficult, crooked, ornery love of America, which would become more and more of a passion in his later years, is flowingly confessed.

> What Karl Marx had no clue for understanding was that the absence in the United States of the feudal class background of Europe would have the effect not only of facilitating the expansion of capitalism but also of making possible a genuine social democratization; that a community would grow up and endure in which the people engaged in different occupations would probably come nearer to speaking the same language and even to sharing the same criteria than anywhere else in the industrialized world. Here in the United States, our social groupings are mainly based on money, and the money is always changing hands so rapidly that the class lines cannot get cut very deep ... we have the class quarrel out as we go along ... We are more lawless [than Europe], but we are more homogenous; and our homogeneity consists of common tendencies which Marx would have regarded as bourgeois, but which are actually only partly explicable as the results of capitalist competition. The common man, set free from feudal society, seems to do everywhere much the same sort of thing—which is not what Marx had expected him to do because it was not what Marx liked to do himself.

Wilson continues in this powerful vein, finally landing on the devastating sentence: "In other words, Marx was incapable of imagining democracy at all."

Yet Wilson cannot get round the problem that Marxism seems to have failed in Russia, and he seems unsure where to place the blame—sometimes at Marx's door, more often at the feet of those "pedants and fanatics" who have distorted Marx's humanism. In this regard there are two fascinating omissions in *To the Finland Station* which, as far as I know, have not been discussed: Rousseau and Dostoevsky. It is strange to write a history of radical political thought that only briefly mentions the thinker most influential on the prime movers of the French revolution, whose own work alleges that society began to go downhill when a single man first declared that his patch of land was private property, whose notion of the "general will" could be described by a later historian as "totalitarian democracy."

But Rousseau's speculative theology of the fall of man only forces the very question that Wilson cannot face in

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Marx. If man was once good, in his state of nature, and is now bad, in his state of society, how exactly did he begin to corrupt? Did he become bad because human nature is corrupt, or because society corrupted his goodness? If the latter, what is the hope for a utopian restoration of man? How do we get back—or back and forward at once—to the ideal state of man? Likewise, did the revolution of 1917 go bad because corrupt human nature cannot be trusted with revolutionary despotism, or because revolution is at its heart a corrupt idea? And if the answer to either question is yes, the question fudged by Rousseau returns: how do we reach utopia, how do we restore what has been lost?

Dostoevsky, only once, and briefly, mentioned in Wilson's book, is in some ways the more flagrant omission, for in *The Possessed*, fictionalizing the rabid cruelty of the revolutionaries Nechaev and Bakunin, he produced a prophetic, highly conservative account of what Leninism would become. It is hard to read the novel without feeling that, in Peter Verkhovensky, arrogant, contemptuous, bullying, murderous, one has really met Lenin. Wilson was not given to theoretical questioning like this, and had very little time for the kind of theological answers that such questions tend to prompt. So Rousseau and Dostoevsky, in their different ways religious, hem Wilson from two sides, both of them finally pessimistic about worldly utopia (though Rousseau did not think he was), and both waving before his eyes the tattered flags of radical defeat.

IV.

Re-reading Edmund Wilson, one's admiration for him both expands and contracts. His literary portraiture is remarkable, and lastingly fine. Meyer Schapiro once remarked that Wilson's subjects are rendered like "the great fictional characters of literature," and it is true that Wilson extends to Marx, to Chapman, to Dickens, to Holmes, to Ulysses Grant, to his father, a kind of negative capability that he never truly summoned in his own fiction: he is willing to give these men the benefit of the doubt, to leave them in a dapple of ambiguity rather than drag them out into any prematurely decisive light of judgment.

He follows the eccentricities and brilliances of a man such as John Jay Chapman with fascinated tact. Chapman, like Wilson's father, had roared out of his upper-class confinement into the political and legal world, only to withdraw into inexplicable obscurity. As a young man, he lost his arm by thrusting it into a fire—he was morbidly in love—and then entered New York politics. Highly literate and refined, he wrote a biographical study of Emerson and countless brilliant essays on literature and philosophy. Wilson does not really know why Chapman withdrew from political and social life. He simply describes it:

> Given the fineness of Chapman's equipment, the overpowering nature of his emotions, and the relentless clarity of his insight—and given the inescapable conviction of his superiority ... there was nothing for him to do but break. And the permanent psychological damage which he had inflicted upon himself by beating his head against the gilt of the Gilded Age was as much one of the scars of the heroism of his passionate and expiatory nature as the hand he had burnt off in his youth.

This is very good; it does what Wilson's father achieved as a lawyer—it fixes in our mind a picture, as in the close of the essay, in which Wilson remembers seeing Chapman, now a middle-aged man, in New York in the 1920s:

> One used to see him, during those years, in New York, in company a figure of a distinction almost exotic for the United States, with his fine manners, his sensitive intelligence, his clothes with their attractive suggestion of the elegance of another era, his almost Jove-like beard and brow, his deep and genial laugh; or for a moment under a quite different aspect, when one had happened to meet him in the street: walking alone, head drooping and brooding, with his muffler around his neck, in his face dreadful darkness and sadness and fear, as if he were staring into some lidless abyss.

What is most surprising, perhaps, in light of Wilson's reputation, is that he is sometimes, in the major essays, a disappointing literary critic. The negative capability that he extends to his people—to their ambiguities, their abysses, their neurotic hollows—he often refuses to

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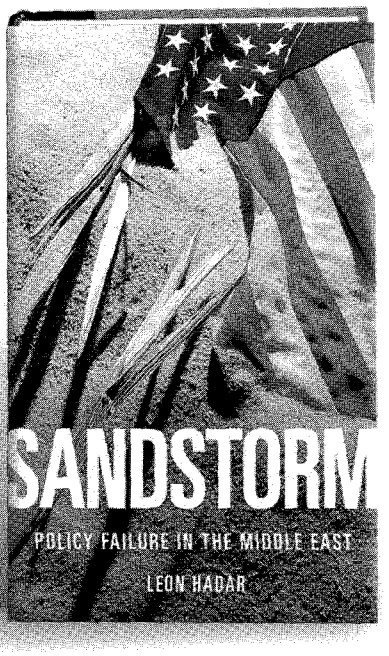

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extend to texts themselves. Indulgent toward biographical ambiguity, he is actually hostile to it when it emerges in literature. To my knowledge, his only published words on William Empson are found in a letter to Louise Bogan, in 1938: "He has one of those untrustworthy minds which in their more uncontrollable forms prove that Bacon wrote Shakespeare." It is telling that Wilson had no time for the great theorist of ambiguity and contradiction, whose "seventh category" of ambiguity in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* occurs when the two meanings of a word "are the two opposite meanings defined by the context, so that the total effect is to show a fundamental division in the writer's mind." Empson concedes that many will presume that contradiction always forms "a larger unity if the final effect is to be satisfying. But the onus of reconciliation can be laid very highly on the receiving end"—that is, readers may want to push reconciliation onto a text, but this may be just our fantasy of wholeness, not the text's, which may want to persist in being contradictory.

It was just this "onus of reconciliation," this need to tidy up ambiguities, that seemed to make Wilson so restless as a critic, and to push him out of the twentieth century and back into the nineteenth or eighteenth. Recall the words with which Wilson memorialized his mentor at Princeton. Christian Gauss, he wrote, always made them feel that Shakespeare would never quite equal a classical literature "that was polished and carefully planned and that *knew how to make its points and the meaning of the points it was making*." This sounds very much like Wilson's own criticism; but it is a weak foundation on which to judge modern literature, with its ironies and its veils. It is the desire to force literature to "make its points and the meaning of the points it is making" that leads Wilson into the coercions of paraphrase again and again.

That coercion is there in the Chekhov essay, and also in his essay on Gogol. It makes the essay on Flaubert dogmatic. It makes a scandal of his essay "The Ambiguity of Henry James," collected in *The Triple Thinkers*. Wilson peculiarly uses *The Turn of the Screw* as the key to unlock what clearly irritates him in James—which is James's apparent refusal decisively to judge his characters, to come down on one side or another. *The Aspern Papers* is praised because "there is no uncertainty whatever as to what we are to think of the narrator"; but in *The Sacred Fount*, as in *The Turn of the Screw*, "the fundamental question presents itself and never seems to get properly answered: What is the reader to think of the protagonist?" James, Wilson decides, was not "clear" in his own mind. "Hitherto, as I have said, it has usually been plain what James wanted us to think of his characters; but now there appears in his work a relatively morbid element which is not always handled objectively and which seems to have invaded the storyteller himself. It is as if at this point he had taken to dramatizing the frustrations of his own life without being willing to confess it, without fully admitting it even to himself."

Flaubert is favorably contrasted with James. In *Sentimental Education*, for instance, "Flaubert is quite emphatic in his final judgment of Frédéric. He considers Frédéric a worm." But this pugilistic confidence is surely misplaced. It is by no means certain what Flaubert thinks of Frédéric, precisely because of the ironic ambiguity of Flaubert's writing, and indeed Henry James himself worried that Flaubert was not entirely in control of these ambiguities. But Wilson tends to revert to biography, and to reductive biography, when he gets into such critical abysses, and sure enough he decides that James's ambiguities really flow from his repressed homosexuality. In a barbarous postscript for a second edition, dated 1948, Wilson digs himself further in by bizarrely accusing James of being fond of describing the sexual violation of children. He reports that he has shown *The Turn of the Screw* to an Austrian novelist who remarked: "the man who wrote that was a *Kinderschander* [child molester]." Wilson seems to concur: "There was always in Henry James an innocent little girl whom he cherished and loved and protected and yet whom he later tried to violate, whom he even tried to kill ... in his impatience with himself, he would like to destroy or rape her."

His much-praised essay on Kipling seems to me similarly reductive, drawing back weaknesses in the work to Kipling's childhood trauma of being sent away at the age of six to stay with cruel relatives in England. Wilson's political hostility to Kipling's work is far more virulent than Orwell's; unlike Orwell, who in his sensible essay on Kipling eschews this kind of biography-mongering, he decides that Kipling's politics can best be explained with reference to an originating wound. (The essay appeared in *The Wound and the Bow*.) Kipling, it seems, learned at an early age to cower before authority and to bully the weak; there was something wrong with "the basic courage and humanity of his character." He was even, so Wilson reports, bossed around by his wife! Here, as in the James essay, Wilson sounds much more Victorian, much more moralistic, than he probably wished to sound. He attacks the weakest stories, and then, too late, praises the great late tales, such as "Mary Postgate" and "The Gardener." But these are briskly celebrated, unlike the poorer stories, which are lovingly excoriated, and there is no really discriminating account of what makes Kipling so exciting to read. The reader has to go to Jarrell's and Trilling's brilliant essays on Kipling for any sense of aesthetic pleasure.

So Wilson's three great childhood inheritances—his interest in neurotic collapse, his neoclassical aesthetic, and his belief in a positivist historicizing of literature—frequently lead him away from an aesthetic account of a work toward biographical speculation and cultural instruction. Wilson is a superb elucidator of the pleasures to be had on first looking into Proust or *Das Kapital*, but it is hard to find any sustained analysis of deep literary beauty in his work. What was ideal "equipment," to use his word from the Chapman essay, for writing about modernism, about the shock of recognition indeed, was comparatively blunt on other surfaces, and it is perhaps no surprise that Wilson began to decline as a critic after World War II. The essays in *A Window on Russia* (1972), mostly written in the 1950s and 60s, are a great disappointment. Not for the first time, reading about Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Gogol, one has the uneasy sensation that the more one knows about the subject the less helpful Wilson becomes. Often it is a matter of tone as much as of comprehension. "In all Tolstoy's talk about love and God," Wilson writes in "Notes on Tolstoy," "it is a little hard to know what he means by either. He does not seem very much to love others; and what is his communion with God?" This is right, as far as it goes, but phrasing it like this, as if merely asking the irritable question is to have irritably answered it, is not to go very far.

At other moments, the most basic comprehension seems to desert him. In the same book he attacks Nabokov's fiction for its addiction to *schadenfreude*:

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"Everybody is always humiliated." In *Pnin*, writes Wilson, "he goes so far as to bring in himself to humiliate in prospect in his own person his humble little Russian professor, who dreads Nabokov's brilliance and insolence." Moving at too rapid a speed, Wilson misses the great comic sympathy extended to Pnin by Nabokov, and fails to see that Nabokov beautifully engineers the novel so that Pnin finally escapes the clutches of the Nabokovian narrator, a narrator who is deliberately made to seem untrustworthy, snobbish, cruel, and not as dear a friend of Professor Pnin as he tiresomely claims to be. The Wilson who could do this to *Pnin* is the same Wilson who found the narrative strategies of late James and Conrad frustrating and needlessly obscure: "the unnecessary circumlocutions and the gratuitous meaningless verbiage."

BY THIS TIME, OF COURSE, THE struggle with Nabokov had become personal. In the 1940s and '50s, Wilson had shown great generosity to the Russian émigré, newly arrived in America. He introduced his new friend to other writers and editors, and properly chivvied him when Nabokov would be about to dismiss—out of almost perfect ignorance, it should be said—Jane Austen or Henry James. It is thanks to Wilson that Nabokov chose to teach *Mansfield Park* and *Bleak House* to his students at Wellesley and Cornell.

What now seems a frail bridge joined the two men until Wilson, in 1954, told Nabokov that he did not think much of *Lolita*; it crumbled slowly for almost a decade, and then spectacularly collapsed when Wilson, with his usual confidence, reviewed Nabokov's translation of *Eugene Onegin* in *The New York Review of Books* in 1963. Wilson was right about the awkwardness of Nabokov's literal English version—though it has many superb and canny triumphs—but he unwisely presumed to set Nabokov straight about his "ineptitudes" in Russian. Nabokov replied by pointing out that Wilson's own piece made several errors in Russian. It was a fight that apparently only Wilson, who read Russian fluently but could barely speak it, thought he could win.

The episode, a sad one for those who, like Mary McCarthy, had witnessed the "joy" that Wilson radiated in "Volodya's" company, is usually read in a spirit of tart Shakespearean symmetry: the two palatial egos deserved this plague on both their houses. But the conflict was deeper-rooted than mere ego. Wilson and Nabokov had never agreed about Russia, about socialism, and had never agreed on how to read fiction. From the very beginning, Wilson had felt that Nabokov's book on Gogol was too aestheticising, too decadent. They would disagree vehemently about the quality of *Dr. Zhivago*, which Wilson championed and Nabokov thought second-rate. Dabney quotes Isaiah Berlin—something he tends to do whenever he wants to lean on greater authority—to the effect that Wilson "was a moral being" while Nabokov "was purely aesthetic," as if this were the last word. But to throw away a friendship for the sake of a few thousand bullyingly corrective words in *The New York Review* was not a very "moral" act, and Nabokov was by no means "purely aesthetic," as his fiction, which so often reflects morally on the dangers of freewheeling aestheticism, beautifully demonstrates.

CURIOUSLY, THOUGH, IF WILson became a poorer critic as he aged, bullishly brushing aside complexities and ambiguities, restlessly exploring one promising cultural site after another—Israel, Canada, Haiti, the Iroquois reservations—he became, if anything, a better writer. As he swerved away from journalism, from the weekly or monthly treadle of reviewing, and into memoir and the writing of his journals, so his prose took on a new lyricism. It was in the 1950s that he wrote the lovely memoirs of his father, and of D. S. Mirsky, the Russian critic and aristocrat whom Wilson had visited in Moscow, and who was arrested in the purges of 1937, dying sometime after that in northeast Siberia. The old stone family house in Talcotville, so full of sublime childhood memories, and where the now aged critic spent more and more of his waning years, always stimulated him.

Dabney quotes, near the end of his biography, a passage from the journal *The Sixties*, in which Wilson describes a watery hollow just off Route 12. It was June 1970, exactly two years before Wilson's death. The portly and wheezing man of letters, always on the *qui vive* for erotic adventure, was newly infatuated with a young female neighbor, and had gone with her to the hollow. But he is content to watch. He sees her take off

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her dress—"I saw her slim brownish figure from behind, and she looked very pretty." Then he paints, in words, as his admired Turgenev so often did, the landscape. The graceful, lucid, lyrical writing has all the virtues of Wilson's determination to see and to describe, his fortifying curiosity and his sure sense that language can objectively capture galaxies of disparate data—natural, literary, political, even sexual.

> You find yourself in a high-walled chasm of stratified limestone rock which is feathered with green fern and lined in the cracks with green moss. Birds flit back and forth between the rapids. The cliffs where they overhang are dripping with springs, and across the river, the farther one goes, the more densely they are plumed, grown with trees: ash, feathery hemlock, elm—bushes of sumac. A dead tree droops down over the stream. The cascade is white, rather crooked and dragged ... A stretch of primitive landscape invisible and little frequented just off the traffic of Route 12. Above the chasm, against the blue, the coverlet of small dappling clouds crawls slowly below the sky.

WILSON PREFERRED TO BE called a journalist rather than a critic, and there is an attractive wholesomeness to this preference. In the end, Wilson's name will last because of everything he wrote—the paradox being, then, that his reputation will last because of many pieces of work that have not lasted. Already out of print and likely to remain so are much of the travel writing, the hundreds of book reviews, the political journalism, the books on Canadian literature, on the Iroquois, on Haiti, on the Dead Sea Scrolls, and so on. The journal-chronicles of the decades, especially *The Sixties,* deserve to live. But a literary world that does not keep the great nineteenth-century diarist H. F. Amiél in print is unlikely to feel much compassion about the much looser, much scrappier chronicler of Talcotville.

Wilson's desire to be called a journalist, which would have been redundant before the twentieth century, becomes more problematic in an era marked by the rise of academic criticism. For Wilson's literary criticism, with its introductory relish, its recourse to biographical speculation, and its swerve away from aesthetic questions, now looks more journalistic than it once did. Pritchett seems to me to have had a more literary sensibility, and a more natural understanding of how fiction works its effects; Empson explains poetry with a far richer respect for ambiguity; Trilling imbricates ideas and aesthetics with greater skill; and Jarrell accounts for beauty with more devoted vivacity. Wilson's criticism, by contrast, exposes the limits of literary journalism in an age when journalism was no longer the only, nor indeed the best, way of attending to literature. Wilson's robust will to mastery, his comprehensive and solitary scholarship sometimes seems to substitute for an equivalent critical rigor in matters of aesthetics, philosophy, and religion. There was a short revolution that almost exactly coincided with Wilson's life, in which literary criticism briefly became both an art and a philosophical discipline—that moment between, say, Eliot's essays of the 1920s and the decline of the New Criticism in the 1950s. Wilson's work stands somewhat to the side of that efflorescence, proudly independent as he always wished it to be, but perhaps now more isolated than he ever thought it would become. ■

David Thomson
The M Factor

THE LOST ONE:
A LIFE OF PETER LORRE
By Stephen D. Youngkin
(University Press of Kentucky, 613 pp., $39.95)

PEOPLE STILL SMILE AT THE thought of Peter Lorre. A lot of us have tried imitations—they turn on that shy, sly, imploring voice, and the way it made every threat sound like endearment. Lorre was an outcast who craved intimacy, so that he could whisper in our ears and get his hands around our throat. We know that he was a wreck, and we assume that he had a survivor's courage or cheerfulness, lending his strange persona to such old favorites as *The Maltese Falcon, Casablanca, Beat the Devil, The Mask of Dimitrios, The Beast with Five Fingers, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea,* and even *Silk Stockings.*

In that last film, he is one of the Soviet commissars sent to America to retrieve Ninotchka, who is in love with Fred Astaire, capitalist lingerie, and CinemaScope dance numbers. He was squat, fat, and very unwell, and so it was Lorre's genius to join in one dance routine by hanging off two useful chairs. That was in 1957, when he was fifty-three. He seems not just older, but near death. And the look on his face, amazed at his wild legs, is caught between tragedy and delirium. The face that was deployed to raise gooseflesh was so hurt by his own reputation and so hurt by the inability to escape it. The more you know about him, the more you wonder whether "survival" is really the word.

Stephen Youngkin has researched and written an immense and fond tribute to Lorre, a book in which over 150 pages are scholarly apparatus. Admirers of the actor, anyone ever pierced by his appalled mix of gentleness and violence, will be grateful for the labor, just as we are dismayed at the prolonged disgust or despair that Lorre seems to have felt himself. And of course this huge memorial to a supporting actor comes from a university press: mainstream publishers these days reckon that not enough people have heard of Peter Lorre.

To this day, Lorre deserves to be taken seriously because of two films. A good many readers of this magazine might remember *M,* made in Germany in 1931, directed by Fritz Lang, a remorseless portrait of a serial killer, a grim diagram of the city as a breeding ground for alienation, a landmark in noir film, and the audience's grudging sympathy for the devil that has known the loneliness that afflicts Lorre's child-killer. This was the

David Thomson has just edited the novel FAN-TAN, *by Marlon Brando and Donald Cammell. He is the author of* THE WHOLE EQUATION: A HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD *(Knopf).*

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work that made Lorre famous even as it damned him to typecasting. But fewer know the other film, *Der Verlorene (The Lost One)*, starring Lorre, but directed by him, too, made in Germany in 1951. *The Lost One* is a clear commentary on *M*, and on the Germany that rose and fell in the years after *M*. It is a remarkable film, and as a commentary on Lorre's life, it was bound to be Youngkin's title.

The Lost One is not quick reading. It is an accumulation of research and by necessity a list of acting jobs undertaken in Germany too long ago to have been seen by the author. According to Youngkin, Lorre appeared in over seventy-five theatrical productions and eleven films before 1933, when he felt compelled to quit Germany. The stories and the wording vary a little, but, more or less, Lorre announced that Germany was too small a place for two famous killers, Hitler and himself. That irony is a measure of Lorre's suspicion that he might never regain his own personality from the looming impact of his Hans Beckert in *M*. The abiding image in that film—so indicative of Lang's vision of cinema as a mirror to the unseen world—is of Lorre in a fedora hat and a dark overcoat, his face aghast yet orgasmic, as he looks over his shoulder and sees in a mirror the white initial scrawled there by an underworld figure: M for murderer. At twenty-nine Lorre already had the sweating baby-face of a morphine addict.

But it isn't enough to mention the flop-sweat or the baby-face. Peter Lorre—born László Loewenstein in Rosenberg, Hungary—grew up looking unique. There is a photo of the boy at five in Youngkin's book: he looks average, handsome, with a hint that his head and his eyes are unusually large. By the time he was grown, he was uncommonly short. There is a telling picture on the set of *Secret Agent* in 1936: three men in a row, John Gielgud, Alfred Hitchcock, and Peter Lorre, all the same height, but Lorre is standing and the other two are sitting.

Then there were his eyes. Lorre's eyes bulged more than usual, and they had pronounced lower lids and bags that he enhanced with make-up. Lorre was a habitual maker of faces, someone who studied himself in the mirror, who chose to cultivate his own oddity. These exaggerated eyes went with the moon face, often split by a child-like smile, the diminutive stature, and the obesity. It was a way of getting work in his chosen vocation of stage acting. He had been far too bored as an apprentice banker. In the theater of Vienna in the 1920s, his real training ground, there were opportunities for a young man if he looked and sounded this odd. He took the name Lorre, which means "parrot" in German, perhaps because of his early skill as a mimic.

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Peter Lorre, circa 1935

Although he was invariably restricted to small parts, Lorre had become a character in Vienna and Berlin by 1930. The great photographer Lotte Jacobi loved him as a subject, and may have been drawn to him personally. She did a cool shot of him in character in Wedekind's *Spring Awakening*, where he seems to have his little-boy head tucked under his own arm. She also asked the actor to sit for a formal portrait: this is head-on, from a raised angle, with Lorre looking up. It stresses two things about him: the way he could slip a crescent of white beneath his popping pupils, and the make-up that he has employed to be more startling. Youngkin's account of the European years is thorough and very useful, but it doesn't hint at the giddy fatalism in Lorre that was always prepared to underline the macabre, or the inhuman, in his own appearance.

Fritz Lang met Lorre in 1929 and he was struck by the actor's resemblance to the criminologist Lombroso's pictures of the murderer type. The introduction was made by the actress Celia Lovsky, Lorre's first wife, and it seems to have occurred in the shadow of *Spring Awakening*, in which Lorre played a characteristically disturbed youth. Lang was the outstanding director in Germany, especially with the recent departure of Lubitsch and Murnau to Hollywood. He was the maker of *Die Nibelungen* and *Metropolis*, epics of studio fabrication, and a man contemplating his first sound picture. He needed to dominate people, and so he took Lorre aside and struck this bargain: make no film in advance and you will be the star of my first talking picture. We can see Lorre's face transfixed: it is the first hint of suspension in the killer's nature. But, of course! the actor says. What is the subject? Lang said that he did not know yet.

We may wonder about the candor of that exchange, just as a director might have worried that an actor could have flinched from so dire a monster. Actors like to be liked. These days, when they have far more power over movies than Lorre ever dared to imagine, they sometimes change the story so as to look better. They fancy that being good-looking is so entangled with being good that apparent virtue sustains a career. It is not easy to think of an ugly Hamlet, or a beautiful Richard III (though Olivier, the great face maker, did play both roles). Against that, there is a small contingent of actors who trade on their "ugliness": Charles Laughton is probably the most celebrated, but others include Emil Jannings, Michel Simon, Gérard Depardieu, and John Malkovich. We know how much Laughton was distressed by his own looks, and a great part of the rare appeal in Malkovich has been the insolence that defies common standards of attractiveness.

Lorre's die was cast with *M*. It is still a very striking, somber film. There had

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never been a comparable case of a pathological killer speaking to the audience so directly. Youngkin plainly cherishes Lorre and all he did, but it is a pity that this full-scale biography does not reflect more fully on the diabolical choices that confront actors, especially as Lorre's own melancholy wit is evident in so many of his remarks: "An actor is the meanest, most contemptible sort of creature alive. So debased that he throws away his own self, his own individuality, and takes on the personality someone else wants him to be—for what?—for money, or maybe for fame."

Moreover, the actor is at the service of the film or the director. *M* is great because the artistic control is an odd expression of the force of character that compels Beckert to be a killer. The actor's spontaneity is given very little room, even if Lang asked Lorre to do some of his own personal face-making in the mirror. When the actor proved incapable of doing a *Peer Gynt* whistle to signal the killer's presence, Lang himself supplied the whistling on the soundtrack. Lorre's plumpness filled a sack-like coat; and until the very end, the fedora suppressed his untidy hair, giving the impression of a little boy dressing up as a man. Indeed, the face is not so much childlike as carnal, but exquisite; sensitive, but hysterical. It is the very look of perversion, and one feels the chilly detachment—the lack of caring—in Lang's exploitation of his own actor.

One of the most famous things in *M* is the way the police search for the killer is duplicated by the underworld. This child-killer is everyone's enemy. In the end, he is captured by the criminals and put on mock trial. It is then that Beckert breaks down, in words written by Lang's wife, Thea von Harbou. The impact is shocking, and it is Lorre's triumph, enough to still conventional moral disapproval, enough in Berlin in 1931 to suggest that killing might become one day normal:

> What do you know about it? What are you saying? If it comes to that, who are you? What right have you to speak? Who are you? ... All of you? ... Criminals! Perhaps you're even proud of yourselves? Proud of being able to break safes, to climb into buildings or cheat at cards.... Things you could just as well keep your fingers off.... You wouldn't need to do all that if you had learned a proper trade ... or if you worked. If you weren't a bunch of lazy bastards. But I ... I can't help myself! I haven't any control over this evil thing that's inside me—the fire, the voices, the torment!

This is still among the most piercing moments of film history, and it won Lorre a wide range of admirers, from Brecht to Chaplin. And so it was no great surprise, in 1933, that the Jewish Lorre decided that his future was restricted in Germany. He stopped off in England and his humor delighted the comfortably sadistic Hitchcock in two thrillers, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Secret Agent*. It was these English films that taught Hollywood to accommodate Lorre as an amusing villain and a character actor who deserved (and dispensed) spectacular deaths.

Lorre was lucky. He caught John Huston's eye for Joel Cairo, the elegant "queer" in *The Maltese Falcon*, and in that picture he met the person with whom he had the surest screen chemistry—Sydney Greenstreet, an English stage actor who was making his screen debut as Casper Gutman. That rapport won Lorre a Warner Brothers contract and a string of entertaining pictures (all with Greenstreet): *Casablanca*, *Background to Danger*, *Passage to Marseille*, *The Mask of Dimitrios*, *The Conspirators*, *Three Strangers*, and *The Verdict*. Their teaming was merry—they were the Laurel and Hardy of menace; and it grew out of considerable mutual enjoyment. But there was a gay subtext to it as well, at a time when being queer was not highly esteemed. Indeed, the celebrated confrontation between Joel Cairo and Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* is a fair version of the Hollywood contempt for the gay life. At the same time, it was so odd and brilliant a scene that it made a kind of pal out of Bogart, too.

Lorre lived quite well at Warner Brothers—well enough to give up one wife for another and to keep his drug habit secret. But he was vulnerable to Hollywood misunderstanding: seven times in three years, he was cast as the Japanese detective Mr. Moto. It was not just that those films were made in a spirit of casual racism and B-picture indifference. It was more that, for an actor raised in German theater, the idea of being reduced to such a stereotype might have been made for a Brechtian comedy. There were a few exceptions, films made for their own sake—the horror film *Mad Love*, directed by Karl Freund, and the fascinating *Stranger on the Third Floor*. But Lorre's vaguely foreign usefulness in sinister roles was over when the war ended. The Warner Brothers contract lapsed in 1946.

The Music-Box Manufacturer

From Tangier said
In life after life
I can do anything I want.

His eyes dyed in hunter green and aqua
The colour of seashells and oysters.

He said no book ever disrupted the order of the Holy Roman Empire
That by myself, I can turn sand into wet concrete
The way a camel can walk fifty kilometers without water.
That thousands of people died building the Suez Canal
That whatever it is, is not over yet.

He said in age after age,
Nothing can console us for wasting ourselves—

Flushed in a snow globe
Each one of us, a little souvenir
A penguin on a block of ice
Watching frost shapes veering away.

FANI PAPAGEORGIOU

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Lang was one of many Germans in Hollywood, and one might have thought that some studio would urge their reunion. It says so much about Lorre's predicament that the one time Lang thought of him it was to play the man in *Human Desire*—a role that ended up with Glenn Ford! (Had fate turned a blind eye, it might have left Lorre and Gloria Grahame as lovers—yes, sir, the stuff of dreams!) Yet there were two films that Lang and Lorre might have attempted together: *Scarlet Street* and *The Woman in the Window*, both of which feature a sad, respectable, middle-class man who is trapped into sexual melodrama and murder. Edward G. Robinson played both lead parts and gave them a more credible, bourgeois pain and strength than Lorre could have managed. Robinson could be nasty and frightening, but he had a grasp of ordinariness, too. As Lang was smart enough to realize, Lorre was a misfit in America—so small, delicate, and intelligent that everyone was going to think the worst of him.

Long before he was fifty, Lorre was roaming, looking for work, and reduced to being the nasty fellow who frightened jokers like Bob Hope and Martin and Lewis. He would end up in comedy horror with Vincent Price. He had tax problems. He could never quite find the courage to accept the offers from Brecht to do something serious. That would have meant giving up America and going to East Berlin, and he was not brave enough for that. Youngkin describes how Lorre was at first a supporter of the actors (led by Bogart and Bacall) who backed the threatened First Amendment in 1947, as the blacklist loomed, but then failed to fly with them to Washington, D.C. I suspect that he was a timid man, easily frightened.

For such a man, *Der Verlorene* was not just a brave gamble, it was also a last shot. Toward the end of the war, and in the years thereafter, Lorre had quietly taken on the duty of visiting refugee camps, those gathering places for the lost and the injured. Without much press, he found himself back in Germany, and thus he was moved to make a picture that might take account of Nazism and its aftermath. German reporters asked if he meant to re-make *M*. Not at all, he said, classics are untouchable. But in fact he had found a story not too far from *M*, about a man who is a murderer because of the terrible impact of the war.

Very little about the project was promising. Germany, in its chaos, was not inclined to be taught lessons by those who had abandoned the country. Lorre was required to be actor and director, as well as co-writer and co-producer, and he was far too disorganized for those latter tasks. He was unwell, trying to inspire an enterprise that always had too few resources, as well as a script that kept changing. Lorre was no Lang, and actors who become directors learn terrible lessons about necessary structure. It all went badly: the film was bitterly received in Germany, and it would not play in America until 1983.

Never mind. *Der Verlorene* is the cry of anguish of a European who sees a culture in rubble, and of an actor whose own history has cast him as "one of the most frightening, ruthless, cold-blooded and meanest individuals of all time," and who struggles with questions about how far evil can be made entertaining or artistic. In an age of easy video access, it is a scandal that Lorre's only work as a director is so hard to find. It is not a perfect film, but it is the best explanation to every mystery that hovers over this remarkable man's hunched shoulders.

Lorre went back to America, increasingly a guest star on television shows, or a gimmick in rotten pictures. There is a story told by director Don Siegel (not in this book) of how Lorre would turn up for work in such a haze that questions such as "What character am I?" and "What is the story?" turned into "What studio is this?" and "What country am I in?" Youngkin paints a tender portrait of a gentle man, full of untidy love, sensitive, well read, ironic, but someone who had given up the ghost. The book works hard to present Lorre as a chum of Bogart's, and they certainly made good films together, but Lorre was slipping as an earner, and there is a cruel class system in Hollywood. When Bogart died, no one saw Lorre at the funeral.

He could never escape the *M* factor. As late as 1963, he was on the *Jack Benny Show* being introduced as "one of the most frightening, ruthless, cold-blooded and meanest individuals of all time." He responded by telling Benny that he was in truth "one of the sweetest men in show business, a man whose emotional sensitivities are touched equally by the cry of a lost child, the chirp of a wounded sparrow, or the silent protest of a crushed petunia. That's the way I really am." But then shtick struck back, and Lorre, who had actually written that amended introduction, giggled and did a song: "I want a girl, just like the girl that murdered dear old dad." If he wanted to collect a check, he was obliged to go along with the old image. The eyes that once leapt at us with fear and fear's root now lay bathed in acid.

Any distress over this muddled life will only be exacerbated by seeing *Der Verlorene*, but still I hope you can find it. This book lacks the eloquence to reach deep into this troubled man or to open up his performances. Still, the record is established here for all time. I wish for the Lorre uncertain which country he was in, but I love the stories that Youngkin has unearthed of Lorre the practical joker. He quotes an immense routine that Lorre and others hatched against their fine but vain director Rouben Mamoulian on the set of *Silk Stockings*. It even concludes with the studio boss, Louis B. Mayer, arriving to enjoy the punch line—which is more than odd, since Mayer had been fired from the studio six years earlier. He could not have been there. But showbiz anecdotage has a way of collapsing our hope for real history. Scholars have to struggle with that kind of contradiction, but Peter Lorre would have accepted it as part of the insane fabric of life. ■

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Chloë Schama
Sweet Gruel

RULES FOR OLD MEN WAITING
By Peter Pouncey
(Random House, 210 pp., $21.95)

FOR THE THREE DAYS PRECEDing his death, Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich fills his house with screaming "so awful that one could not hear it through closed doors two rooms away without horror." In this span of time, an eternity to Ivan's caretakers, "time did not exist for him." Ivan's final epiphany happens, in his own mind, in a single instant, but for those who watch over his deathbed the "moment" lasts an agonizing two hours. For the dying, according to Tolstoy, time ceases to exert its conventional influence.

Peter Pouncey's novel sets out to navigate this period of timeless time. As his protagonist, Robert MacIver, waits for his death, he slips in and out of his past, and in and out of stories that he has invented: "some kind of tally of his memories." All this slippery movement not only disrupts the linear march toward death, it also generates a novel of structural and stylistic sophistication. But the complexity of the novel lies primarily in its structure: the subject and the tone of MacIver's recollections vary widely, but each layer of narrative is quite simple. Pouncey wishes to show that a collection of dissimilar narratives can coalesce into something more moving than a formal experiment, that emotional authenticity can emerge from structural complexity.

At first, the novel seems straightforward. Pouncey balances the multiple strains of narrative with updates on MacIver's day-to-day struggles. When MacIver feels his physical and mental condition deteriorating, he constructs a list to guide his behavior, reasoning, "it would be healthy for him to tell himself what to do":

1. Keep personally clean.
2. Make bed every morning, and clean house twice a week.
3. Dress warmly, and light fire when necessary, burning least important things first.
4. Eat regularly.
5. Play music and read.
6. Television only in the evening, except for weekend and seasonal showdown sports.
7. Work every morning. Nap in afternoon if needed.

Nearly every chapter begins with an update on MacIver's progress, a measure of the success or failure of the rules: "Not a good night, but still bearable," or later, "the worst night yet, the one that promised there would not be many more."

The facticity of the account is moving, as we are made privy to every mishap: "he had become light-headed in the shower stall, and after apparently bouncing off the walls on his way down, he had found himself on all fours on the floor, with the water obliviously pounding him from above." MacIver even confides his self-patented recipe "for toothless old men with blocked esophagi," a concoction he calls "Sweet Gruel": "To a base of lukewarm water (adjust temperature to taste), add three Pepperidge Farm lemon cookies, and mash them in the bowl to the smoothest paste. Swallowability is the key criterion of consistency. Add three heaped spoons of honey and as much single malt as your heart desires. Stir all together, and then spoon the concoction in small mouthfuls into the expectant gob." By mixing pathos with humor, Pouncey concocts his own "Sweet Gruel," a narrative whose lively tone makes the banal and painful subject matter of MacIver's decline enjoyable.

THE SECOND LAYER OF NARrative emerges from MacIver's imperative to "tell a story to its end." As his mind weakens, MacIver finds himself prey to an unbidden assault of images: "men in battle fatigues ... running athletically and confidently ... some commander's voice could be heard in the background making a radio report, clear above the static...." The hallucinations derive from interviews that MacIver conducted as a young historian in order to examine the effects of poison gas used in World War I. Once MacIver determines to "steal a march on the random images that invade," the inspiration for his work is in place: "he thought he would use some of them to write a story about a particular sector of the front in a short span of time."

The novel within the novel that MacIver strings together from these memories is unabashedly melodramatic. The evil Sergeant Braddis grows his fingernails "three quarters of an inch from the end of the finger" and shapes them "to a point very close to the lines of the bayonet...." Kind and soft-spoken Private Callum, more an artist than a soldier, fears upsetting his primary school teacher by drawing pictures that are too grim. Neither the characters nor the plot are subtly drawn—good and evil are quickly dueling within the platoon—but their story is genuinely compelling, perhaps because it is punctuated by the mundane chronicle of MacIver's dailiness. In this novel, the quotidian acts as a kind of narrative conscience.

The exposition of MacIver's past, by contrast, surrenders neither to the melodrama of his fantasy nor to the homeliness of his routine. This portion of the narrative, with its blend of the ordinary and the extraordinary, strikes a balance between the disparate tones and styles. MacIver tells of his boyhood in Loch Affric, his triumphs as a rugby star, his first brush with battle as a soldier in the navy, and he emerges as a blustery, headstrong, and sometimes brutal man. He is a vessel of competing energies; when he becomes animated by a plan or idea he describes "the old adrenaline tank filling up with bile and ebullience." When he accidentally lands "with his studs and full fourteen stone" on the back of a selfish teammate's knee he notes the "satisfying yell of pain" that his aggressive playing produces. His violent nature serves him well on the playing field, and later on, in battle; but in the less fraught episodes of his life, MacIver's brutality is a liability. As his friend observes, "The thing about you is that you have a lot of violence in your nature, and only a piece of you disapproves of the fact." To amend this tendency, the friend advises, "you had better find a gentle girl and marry her, so you can learn the rest."

MacIver accepts the advice. Femininity, first as a concept, and then embodied by his wife Margaret, emerges as the counterpoint to MacIver's brute mascu-

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linity. "It is the real women who gentle our condition" MacIver remarks, and in Margaret he believes he has found such a "real" woman. There are wonderful moments of intimacy between Margaret and MacIver, such as the description of their nighttime swims: "MacIver, an energetic but clumsy swimmer, would thrash the water into turbulence out into the deep and then make for shore, trying to use the towel as little as possible, to leave it dry for Margaret ... He would lose her in the shadowed background at the far end, and peer with great concentration into the dark, trying to catch the first ripple of her return."

At times Margaret becomes a bit of an abstraction, a flawless palliative for MacIver's faults. Pouncey's spare style, elsewhere successful, falls short here, and his dialogue suffers for it. After a rough period, MacIver tells Margaret he needs to know "just how bad it's been." Margaret responds, "It's been bad, I won't deny it." For a person involved in an intense marital embroilment, this seems too flat and too serene. Margaret's reign over the kitchen is charming at first; she gleefully sorts through groceries, "gliding barefoot around the kitchen and cheerfully stashing food ... destined in her mind for a series of dinner recipes planned for the days ahead." But she is too often presented in this realm, as though the power of her femininity derives from her domesticity. In the contrasting scenes of strength and weakness, masculinity takes many forms, but the feminine remains static, unvarying, and somewhat stereotypical.

To be sure, this is only MacIver's view of femininity: we must not mistake the narrator for the author. It seems plausible, according to the boyish character Pouncey creates, that MacIver reveres Margaret's ability to foster peace and well-being within the home. Pouncey has a gift for drawing a character with a few careful strokes. Most of the members of the ever-widening constellation of characters that rotate around MacIver do not lack their own depth, nor do they detract from the gravitational pull that MacIver exerts.

This collection of simple stories finally becomes much more: a strong portrait of a mind engaged in its own unraveling, a moving, mosaic-like book. Pouncey's portrait combines the fact and the fiction of MacIver's life, the past and the present, exploring the most disorienting time in a man's life without disorienting the novel's readers. But the novel stumbles when it lays MacIver's soul-searching bare: MacIver proceeds through the inventory of his memories as though it "might tell him what his life amounted to"; and relatively early in the novel, MacIver says that he measures the success of his life by the extent to which he learns the lessons his wife imparts—the extent to which he learns to temper his natural ferocity with grace. These bathetic moments clash with the elegant understatement that characterizes most of the novel. If *Rules for Old Men Waiting* teaches anything, it is that the "meaning" of a life, or of a narrative, is not easily encapsulated, but may derive from irreconcilable contradictions and unexpected combinations. Pouncey rightly does not resolve MacIver's platitudinal measures of his life. The reader, like MacIver, is left waiting more wisely. ■

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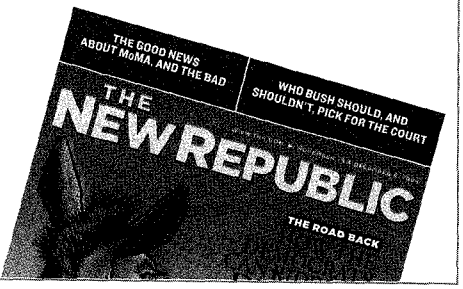

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NEW ORLEANS DIARIST

Past as Prologue

MY STREET WAS DESERTED Sunday, when a couple of friends and I checked on it. A few military types were cutting away at the trees blocking a major intersection nearby, and, at one point, two guys who live around the block stopped by because they saw our cars outside. Beyond that, the neighborhood was a ghost town, just like most of the rest of New Orleans. The people who lived here until two or three weeks ago have gobbled up real estate in Baton Rouge. Or they're holed up with relatives. They're sleeping in sports arenas, or they've accepted offers of refuge in far-flung towns across the country. In Utah right now, the natives must be mystified by these odd newcomers, who call everybody "baby" and start long conversations with strangers in the grocery line.

THIS EXODUS FROM NEW ORLEANS, WE keep hearing, is one of the greatest mass movements of Americans since the Civil War. But Hurricane Katrina didn't start it. The diaspora has been going on for years. The dearth of high-paying jobs—and the corresponding brain drain—has been the focus of every major political campaign in Louisiana in recent years. When she ran in 2003, Kathleen Babineaux Blanco vowed to be "the governor who brought our children home." Houston, Atlanta, and other Sun Belt cities were already crawling with ex-Louisianians when the hurricane formed. The storm only accelerated this and other baleful trends. New Orleans is one of those cities that inspires fierce loyalty from its residents. But, if evacuees find better jobs and safer homes elsewhere, they might well come to view leaving New Orleans as a necessary step, like a painful breakup that was bound to happen sometime or other.

THE IMAGES THAT HAVE POURED OUT OF New Orleans since Katrina hit—weary evacuees, rampant looting, corpses lying uncollected for days—have been searing, and they hardly seem to come from the same planet as the fun-loving New Orleans of lore. But, in fact, many of these images hint at a malaise that existed long before the storm. Take the looting at the Wal-Mart on Tchoupitoulas Street the day after the levees began to fail. The store itself opened last year as part of a "redevelopment" of the decrepit St. Thomas public housing complex. The plan, according to critics, involved a net loss in cheap housing units and a tax scheme that helped the world's largest retailer. The public debate was loud, long, and acrimonious. None of this quite explains why people used Katrina as an excuse to relieve the store of its flat-screen televisions, but resentment was clearly simmering well in advance of the storm.

SO WERE A LOT OF OTHER PROBLEMS. AN iconic photo floating around the right-wing reaches of the Internet shows a parking lot full of waterlogged New Orleans school buses. Ostensibly, it proves that Democratic Mayor Ray Nagin missed the chance to get more people out before the storm. But the photo in question says less about the mayor than it does about the school system. The elected school board is independent from other city agencies, and the system is in dreadful shape, academically and financially. After the system couldn't account for $70 million in federal grants, the state forced the board to hire a private financial manager this summer to sort out the mess. That company couldn't find any reliable records of how many people actually worked for the system, and it reported that the board's latest and supposedly balanced budget was really $48 million in the hole. The incompetence raises an obvious question: If the mayor had sought help from this crew, would that have saved lives or merely wasted precious time?

NEW ORLEANS'S PLIGHT COMES THROUGH in another image: the city's damaged skyline. Office towers lost windows and parts of their roofs during Katrina. But they lost tenants like Amoco long before. Major energy firms used to be a mainstay of the city economy. But, in the late '90s, amid a wave of mergers and consolidations, thousands of good jobs either went to Texas or vanished entirely. It's little wonder that, according to the Census Bureau, the state lost nearly 10,000 more young, single college graduates than it attracted between 1995 and 2000. The population of the entire metro area has crept up slightly in the last 15 years, but only because, most of the time, fewer people are dying than being born.

LOTS OF TOURISTS VISIT NEW ORLEANS for the party atmosphere, but people live here for the relaxed pace, the bright colors on the houses, and the unruly trees and grass and flowers that refuse to yield to the works of man. If you sit out on the front porch at night, the air smells, depending on the weather and the time of year, of confederate jasmine or sweet olive or damp tree bark. Or at least it did. As I write this, much of the city remains under water that has been cooking in 90-degree heat and leaves behind a gray-brown dust when it recedes. Even streets that have been dry for days stink like some long-polluted lake.

THERE ARE MORE SUBSTANTIAL REASONS to worry about the city's future. No one knows whether insurance companies will keep writing policies here or what will happen to all the houses that have been underwater for weeks. Some New Orleans businesses are already moving to Baton Rouge or out of state. Most of the city's flood victims won't be allowed a look at their homes until next week at the earliest, so many of them will return to a netherland of mildew and mold. And, even if reconstruction money starts pouring in tomorrow, New Orleanians have to worry about another enduring pattern: the political patronage that has crippled public services in the city. Over the summer, federal grand jurors indicted some close supporters of Nagin's immediate predecessor, Marc Morial, on charges of squeezing money out of city agencies. A poor city in a poor state can't afford such indulgence. Especially now.

THE WATER HERE IS DRAINING FASTER than most people expected, and it's now possible to fantasize, at least, that life here will go on just as it did before the storm. But to thrive, New Orleans needs a clean break, not only from Katrina's destruction, but from its own recent past.

DANTE RAMOS

Dante Ramos is deputy editorial page editor of THE TIMES-PICAYUNE.

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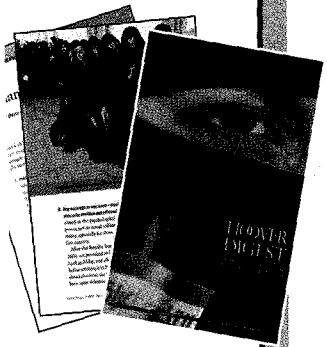
The Genocide Trap

HOOVER DIGEST
RESEARCH AND OPINION ON PUBLIC POLICY



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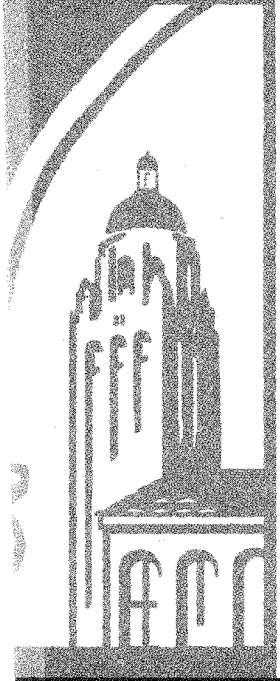

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"The essence of who we are is at stake. Genocide is evil and must be stopped." So declared New Jersey senator Jon Corzine when he introduced the Darfur Accountability Act last March. The evil in question was the widespread atrocities that are still under way in western Sudan, including the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians, along with rape, torture, kidnapping, pillaging, and the forced displacement of millions.

Senator Corzine echoed Secretary of State Colin Powell and President George W. Bush, who six months earlier had used the word "genocide" to characterize the death and destruction in Darfur. That was a historic moment, as the U.S. government for the first time labeled an ongoing crisis "genocide." But the real surprise was that this genocide finding did not trigger an urgent rescue operation. It wasn't supposed to work this way.

The 1948 Genocide Convention was assumed to have put its signatories under legal obligation to stop acts of genocide. The treaty defined genocide down from the eliminationist policies of the Holocaust to "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such." But events have shown that it is hard to prove the genocidal intent of leaders while a crisis is unfolding, that it is not always clear that people are being persecuted simply because they belong to a particular group, and that it is uncertain how substantial a "part" of such a group must be victimized in order to cross the genocide threshold.

These ambiguities have muddled the deliberations over Darfur, just as they did past discussions about "genocide" in Cambodia, Iraq, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. The result is a time-consuming debate that David Bosco, senior editor at *Foreign Policy* magazine, calls "a warped diplomatic parlor game: (who will say the G-word first?)." Although Washington has determined that the crisis in Darfur constitutes genocide, the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union, and key human rights organizations continue to dance around the label. Bosco suggests that for cases such as Darfur we adopt the less charged, but no less actionable, term "crimes against humanity."

Now that we know that the Genocide Convention provides no automatic moral or legal trigger to action, steering away from the label makes good sense. It may also make decisive intervention on the part of the United States more likely. Why? To most Americans, "genocide" means nothing less than the absolute evil of the Holocaust. This reinforces Washington's tendency to take an all-or-nothing approach to crises such as Darfur. U.S. logistical and airlift support for African Union troops hardly seems adequate to honor our solemn promise of "Never again."

Ending our fixation with "genocide" will by no means guarantee armed humanitarian intervention in places such as Darfur. But at least the debate about what should be done won't be obscured by an ambiguous treaty or the shadow of history.

—Bertrand M. Patenaude

Bertrand M. Patenaude is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution.

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